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THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

Interviews with
Joseph A. Moore
and
Kathleen Pabst

With an Introduction by
Stephen Gale Herrick

Interviews Conducted by
Ruth Teiser

Funded by gifts in memory of Theodore R. Meyer

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The circular staircase in the
Mechanics' Institute Building

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INTRODUCTION

The telephone directory shows the Mechanics' Institute at 57 Post Street. This is an unlikely location for a membership library and chess club--for these are the activities offered at the Institute. Here is what we see at 57 Post:

This nine-story building in the middle of the block between Kearny and Montgomery doesn't look very large, considering those that now surround it. Montgomery Street is San Francisco's financial center and Kearny is the border of the area of expensive shops. Doubtless when it was built, by the Mechanics' Institute, it was a major building in the City. The architecture is neo-classical: the entrance is through a Roman arch, and above the entrance you see in gold lettering on the glass "Mechanics' Institute Building," indicating that they own and operate the building, and below that, "Mechanics' Mercantile Library." To the left of the building is the McKesson Building, a square structure of 37 stories with the four corners snipped off. It was formerly one of Crocker Bank's buildings. When the Crocker Bank decided to build this structure they made every effort to acquire the Institute's property. Crocker would have demolished the Institute's building and thus increased the land for their building. Crocker offered space in the new structure for the Institute's use and a very generous price in an attempt to persuade the Trustees of the Institute to sell Crocker the property. The Institute would not sell.

On the right are two small buildings, neither of them as tall as the Mechanics' Institute building. These two adjoining buildings are now surrounded by scaffolding and barricades. It is apparent that the owner of this adjoining property, the San Francisco Federal Savings & Loan, is about to demolish the two small buildings and construct a major addition to the City's skyline.

This next door neighbor--the owner of the two smaller buildings--reminded the Institute that they owned something of value which they could not see and which they had forgotten they could sell. When the City placed a limitation on the height of buildings in the area they granted the shorter buildings the right to build a taller building if they should rebuild. Furthermore the City permits the shifting of the "sky right" from one property to another nearby. So San Francisco Federal--the owner of the land next to the Institute--asked the Institute to sell them the unused height limit so San Francisco Federal could build an even taller building.

The Trustees put this decision up to the members who voted decisively to sell the Institute's sky rights. The Institute gained a considerable sum and sacrificed their right to build a building much taller than their present nine-story property. Members are now assured that their Institute will remain just as it is, which is the way they like it.

Across the street from the library is the new 47-story Crocker Center-West Tower which includes a shopping mall called The Galeria, roofed over by a large glass-covered arch. In the Galeria there are four floors of luxury shops offering extravagant wares.

In front of the library building we find an extension of the sidewalk which is a stopping place for the street buses that use Post Street. It is possible to dismount from a bus within ten paces of the front door of the library. In fact, there are at least 12 bus routes that pass within one block of the library's location. Not only buses and streetcars nearby, but also a station of the BART--Bay Area Rapid Transit--system is at the next corner on Market Street.

On the step at the entrance to the library is a well-worn brass disc which reads:

Mechanics' Institute
1855
1909

1855 is of course the year of founding of the Institute and 1909 is the year the building was completed.

In the lobby of the building there are several interesting features, the most prominent being a large mural entitled "The Arts" by Arthur F. Mathews. Below the mural is a card which reads: "Installed by the Mechanics' Institute to replace the painting--destroyed in the Fire of 1906--presented to the Institute by Rudolph J. Taussig." Unfortunately the painting has been heavily varnished and the brilliance of the colors is dulled. A version of the Mathews painting is the source of the Institute's bookplate. Opposite the painting is an extraordinary plaque which today would cost at least \$10,000 to replace! It is a bronze casting and reads that James Lick bequeathed to the Mechanics' Institute of San Francisco \$10,000 for the purchase of mechanical and scientific books. This is a rare plaque as it bears no date. Above the lettering is a profile in bronze of Mr. Lick, with his full beard, and, I might say, full-sized nose.

At the end of the lobby is a handsome bronze door and screen furnished with jail-like bars and also covered with unbreakable wire glass. The bronze screen extends to the second level above the entrance.

The directory indicates not only the various offices of the Institute but also those of the tenants and of the Chess Room on the fourth floor. The hours of the library-institute on the second and third floors are indicated on the directory and are 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. all days but Sunday, when the hours are 1 to 5 p.m. The list of tenants does not reveal any special character. Tenants are lawyers and foundation offices, insurance companies and so forth.

Visible behind the screen at the end of the lobby is the commencement of the unique stairway, the treads of which are marble. It is a winder but a very comfortable winder as it is amply wide for two or three people. The handrail is the same bronze workmanship as the screen.

The three elevators obviously were replaced at least once after the building was built, as they are quite up to date and operate smoothly. They are lined with a remarkably impervious substance on which messenger boys are not able to scrawl obscenities.

The second and third floors were especially designed for the library and contain two or three levels of stacks.

The much-used and very popular Chess Room is on the fourth floor. This is probably the most important chess room west of New York and has been in existence for many, many years. (My father was a regular player in the Chess Room up to 1918.)

A reading of this oral history demonstrates the devotion of two Trustees and the Librarian. Certainly Theodore Meyer and Joseph A. Moore, Jr., should be credited with carrying on the Institute's traditions. Librarian Pabst's testimony makes it very clear that she realizes her part in maintaining the precious character of the organization developed since its founding in 1855.

As long as the Institute is in the hands of persons like these the 128-year-old institution will survive and flourish. It is comforting to be able to expect this refuge to survive for many future decades--and centuries, as well!

Stephen Gale Herrick

September 1983
San Francisco, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY

The interviews concerning the recent past and present of the venerable Mechanics' Institute of San Francisco were undertaken in memory of Theodore R. Meyer, who devoted many hours to the leadership and management of the organization as a member of the board of trustees from 1951 until 1973 and its president for six of those years.

As Joseph A. Moore, who followed Mr. Meyer as president, noted in his interview, Mr. Meyer contributed more than any other person to the welfare of the Mechanics' Institute during his years on the board: "He did everything he could in every area to make it go."

Mr. Moore, a man of similar inclination and distinction, was a friend and associate of Mr. Meyer of many years' standing. He was interviewed in his San Francisco office July 7 and July 13, 1982, discussing the Mechanics' Institute in the years during which he has known it, first as a young user of its library, then as trustee and president, more recently as an interested observer. He spoke thoughtfully and made very few changes as he read the transcript of his interview.

Kathleen Pabst, who was appointed librarian in 1974, follows in the tradition of most of her predecessors as a devoted and energetic analyst of the library users' needs and the ways to supply them. She was interviewed in her office, looking out upon a portion of the second floor reading room, on December 30, 1982. She spoke with enthusiasm and edited her interview transcript carefully, mainly for precision.

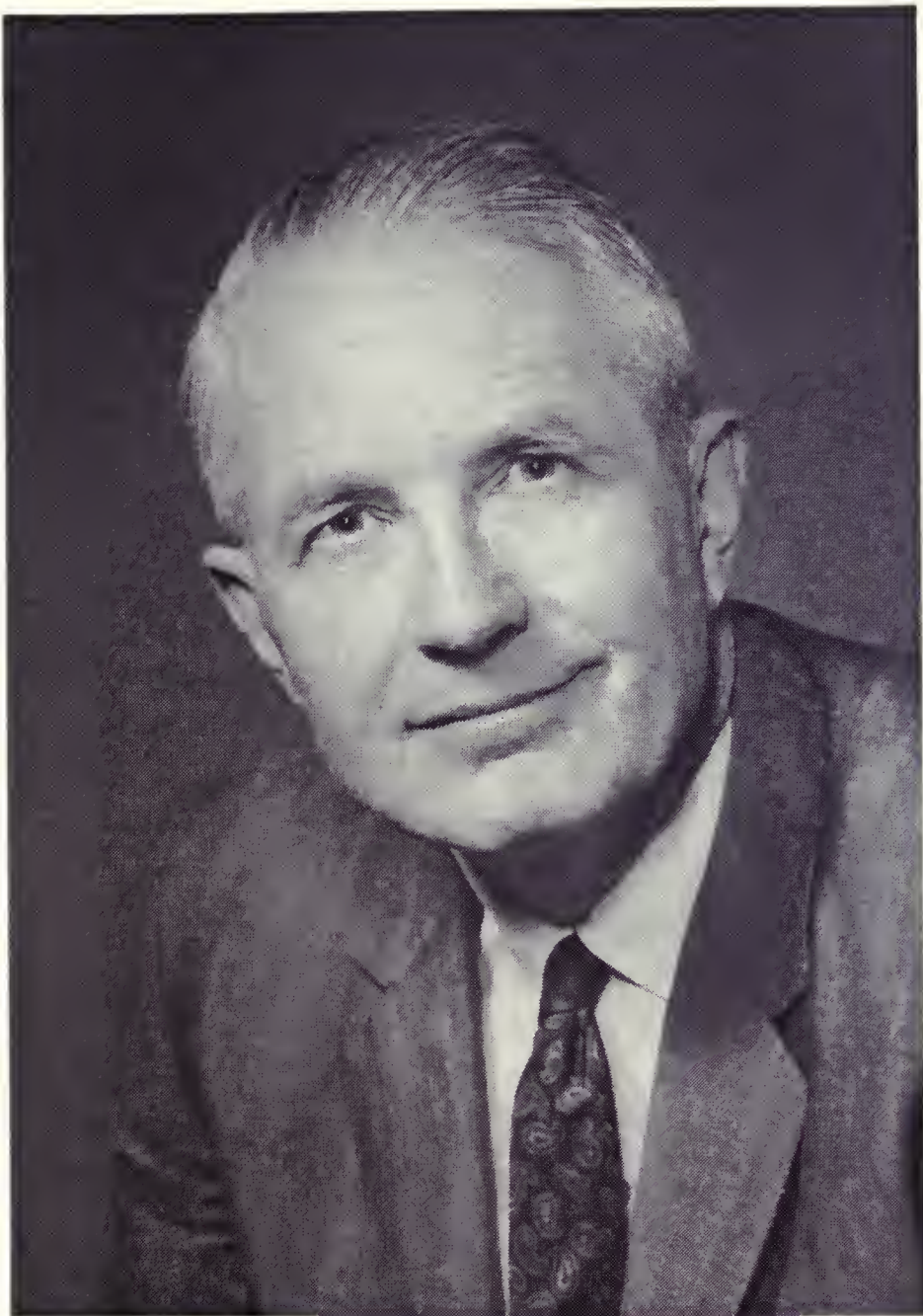
These interviews bring forward the history of the Mechanics' Institute as written in two of its publications: SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS OF HISTORY OF THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTE OF SAN FRANCISCO, compiled by John H. Woods and issued in 1930; and 100 YEARS OF THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTE OF SAN FRANCISCO, 1855-1955, a compilation made by Genevieve Tompkins, John C. Stump, and others, under the editorial direction of John J. Cuddy, issued in 1955. We are grateful to Mrs. Pabst for making available for inclusion in this interview volume her own notes on the history, and the text of Theodore R. Meyer's address delivered in 1964 in which he gave additional insight into the development of the institution.

We are grateful also to Stephen Gale Herrick, a devoted library user, for the keen description of the Mechanics' Institute which serves as an introduction.

Ruth Teiser
Interviewer-Editor

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JOSEPH A. MOORE



Joseph A. Moore

Member of the
Mechanics' Institute Board of Trustees
1951-1977

President, 1969-1974

The Library and the Librarians

[Interview 1: July 7, 1982]##

Teiser: We'd like to start with your earliest recollections of the Mechanics' Institute. You said you started going there as a child?

Moore: Yes. I first started going to the Mechanics' Institute when I was in the public schools of San Francisco, in the early years of this century. I was born in 1908. I think I became a member. My father was a member, and my mother,*I believe. I used to go down there after school on many occasions. It was a wonderful experience for a very young child. I was probably six to ten years old when I first went there.

Teiser: Were the members of your family great readers?

Moore: My mother was. My father less so because he was always very busy; didn't have the time to read as much as he would like to have.

Teiser: Did you enjoy reading as a boy?

Moore: Yes, a great deal.

Teiser: It must have helped you in school, as a student.

Moore: I think so, yes.

Teiser: What was the atmosphere of the library like when you were first there?

Moore: I have always thought that the Mechanics' Institute was, and has remained to a great extent--much more than many other organizations--an unchanging institution. My memories of those days are very similar

##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 28.

*Joseph A. Moore, Sr. and Mildred Rolph Moore

- Moore: to my memories of the fifties, sixties, and even today. You'd go in there and everybody was friendly, willing to help children. Later on when I became older they are always willing to help me.
- Teiser: Was it a place where people at that time were very diverse? Did you find many different kinds of people going there?
- Moore: Through all the years it's always been my experience that it was an institution that had people of all types, classes. They joined the Mechanics' Institute and used it, in my opinion, through all the years because it could give them something that they could not get elsewhere.
- Teiser: Did you go to the San Francisco Public Library as a youngster?
- Moore: Yes, sure. There were lots of things we had to do for school that you had to go to the public library for.
- Teiser: Can you compare those two institutions then, from your earliest time?
- Moore: No, I don't think you can. I think they each had and have their own missions. They're both doing it very well, or were in those days. I suppose they still are.
- Teiser: I suppose in the years you were at college you didn't frequent the Mechanics' Institute?
- Moore: As I remember I did not use the Mechanics' Institute when I was in college.
- Teiser: Did you come directly to Moore Dry Dock after college?
- Moore: Yes, I did. I graduated from Berkeley in '29 and I spent two years at the Graduate School of Business at Stanford. Then I came back and lived in San Francisco and worked in Oakland for many, many years.
- Teiser: So then you resumed your acquaintance with the Mechanics' Institute in about 1931?
- Moore: Yes, about then.
- Teiser: Did you have time to go there very much?
- Moore: On occasion during the years. I never spent as much time as I had when I was in elementary and secondary schools, but I used it and enjoyed it over most of my lifetime.

Teiser: When you first knew it there were some old-timers there. There was a Mr. John H. Wood, who was the secretary.

Moore: I've heard that name, but I really did not know him.

Teiser: Did you know Mrs. Mary Carmody?

Moore: I knew of her but I never knew her. I did know a Mr. John Stump over a period of many years. He was a wonderful, wonderful person. A great book man. I think the Mechanics' Institute owes very much to him over a long period of years.

Teiser: I remember him as a very mild, very pleasant man.

Moore: But that was part of the atmosphere of the Mechanics' Institute. In my opinion it was one of the great attributes that it had; that it offered opportunity to everyone. Everyone always felt at home. Certainly the attitude of the staff over all the years has been conducive to that feeling, which has made it possible for the Mechanics' Institute to be so much to so many people.

Teiser: It's interesting that the staff you speak of has been inclined to stay on and on and on. Most of the people there had long careers with the Mechanics' Institute, in spite of very low salaries even for then.

Moore: That is definitely true.

Teiser: Why do you think that was?

Moore: I've asked myself that question. I think dedication had a lot to do with it. And I think that librarianship has been a field which is probably--not only in San Francisco but all over the country--where the pay has been lower and the opportunities for advancement and to get into other libraries and better ones have been probably lower than in most vocations. I don't say this happily; I'm just saying--. You asked me why I think this has happened.

Teiser: Yes. So they stayed partly because there were no opportunities and partly because of their devotion to the institution. Am I saying this correctly?

Moore: I think the devotion had a lot to do with it. And it was always a family. The pay in public libraries was always much higher, and in the university libraries. But the Mechanics' Institute was particularly fortunate--and it has been through all the years--in the dedication, devotion and effectiveness of their staff.

Teiser: As I remember, Mrs. Carmody was there for many years. Then Mr. Stump carried on for many years.* He was not chief librarian for so many years, but before that he was quite visible. He was the one who, it seems to me, was there where you would see him and deal with him.

Moore: Yes. Then he was followed by Mr. [Norman] Green, who had been his assistant for a number of years. Then, as I remember, Mr. Green was replaced by another librarian who left after a relatively short period and Mr. Green came back for a while.

Teiser: Yes, a man named [Robert] Michalske.

Moore: Mr. Michalske, yes.

Teiser: Mr. Green then returned?

Moore: He did, yes.

Teiser: What as he like? I don't remember him at all.

Moore: Another quiet, efficient, friendly type. A little more worldly than Mr. Stump, if I can use that word. Did a very good job.

Teiser: Was Mr. Michalske the same sort of person?

Moore: He was a very different type. He was a much younger man and had different ideas. But he was only there, I think, about two years.

Teiser: Then Mrs. [Kathleen] Pabst succeeded Mr. Green?

Moore: Yes. She has been there since. From everything I can hear and learn in my association with her, which is not as close as it was in years gone by with the Institute, I'm sure she's doing a very good job.

Teiser: She came from a different background, a corporate job.

Moore: Yes. She was the librarian for Utah Construction.**

Teiser: Which is quite a different tradition. I suppose the others came just out of library school.

Moore: Yes, and most of them [head librarians] out of many years with the Institute.

*He was Librarian of the Mechanics' Institute from 1949 to 1970.

**Now Utah International Inc.

Teiser: That's a break with tradition, I suppose.

Moore: No. The break with tradition, which had been very strong for promotion from within, was when Mr. Michalske became the librarian.

Teiser: Oh, I see. He had not been there very long?

Moore: No.

Teiser: I remember there was something in the minutes about appointing him assistant, but it must have been just before Mr. Stump left--in anticipation--

Moore: Yes. That was done on kind of an interim basis to get him working.

The Secretary and the Building

Teiser: The position of secretary of the Mechanics' Institute is rather more important than one might think, is it not?

Moore: The position of secretary really might be called business manager in many other organizations. He, or she--it's been a woman for many years--really runs the show. Not the professional side, which is run by the librarians, but everything else that goes on. And she is the secretary of the corporation and of the trustees.

Teiser: The secretaries whom you knew would have been Genevieve Tompkinson, for many years--

Moore: Yes, for many, many years. She was the secretary when I became a member of the board in 1951, and remained for many years. Then she became quite ill and left.

Teiser: In 1957 Eileen Cook became secretary.

Moore: Yes, and has remained so until a few years ago.

Teiser: Were they very efficient women?

Moore: It would be difficult for me to judge the earlier one, Miss Thompson, because I think the complexities of the Institute and the difficulties became much greater during the tenure of Eileen Cook. I have felt that she was extremely efficient.

Teiser: The secretary is also the building manager, isn't she?

Moore: Yes, she is. The building is the main asset of the Mechanics' Institute, and the Mechanics' Institute occupies less than a third of the space in the building. The remainder is outside tenants. She is, but she has been helped by members of the Board of Trustees, of whom there have been several who are well versed in real estate matters. We've also had several large expenditures for doing over the building on at least two different occasions. One, new elevators. She had to really run that, but was helped, again, by several members of the board who were very well versed in that type of activity.

Teiser: This was Eileen Cook?

Moore: Yes.

Teiser: There must have been various complexities, but it seemed to me, as I read the minutes, that the board was forever having to reconsider the lease with the Poodle Dog, the Calixte Lalanne family lease.

Moore: That's correct, yes. That was the star tenant. As you probably know, in recent years they have gone out of business, after Mrs. Lalanne passed away. I don't know whether they've still gotten that straightened out. There have been law suits and--

Teiser: The others I suppose were simple compared with that. Most of the arrangements with tenants seemed fairly straightforward and seemed to be renegotiated easily.

Moore: I think so, yes.

Teiser: Jay Briggs Clothiers has been there also for many years.

Moore: Yes, that store has been there for many years and has done very well.

Theodore R. Meyer and the Board

Teiser: When did you first know Mr. Theodore Meyer?

Moore: I first knew him in the thirties. His firm, the firm at which he was a partner for many years, was Brobeck, Phleger & Harrison. Mr. Herman Phleger* who's still alive by the way--in his nineties--has been a director of our company, the Moore Dry Dock Company, since 1927 and the firm still represents us. The man who in that firm was the lawyer that handled our account was Theodore Meyer, starting--just at a guess--at the late thirties or maybe during the war. I've known him ever since on a very close basis.

*Herman Phleger, Sixty Years in Law, Public Service and International Affairs, an oral history interview conducted in 1977, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley 1979.

Teiser: What sort of man was he?

Moore: One of the greatest. A sincere, dedicated, very intelligent and effective lawyer and man, and friend of mine. I had many personal associations with him socially, and many professional associations over a period of about thirty years. He was my personal lawyer as well as for our company.

Teiser: And you shared an interest in the University of California.

Moore: Yes, we did. We did share that interest. He and I both became trustees of the Mechanics' Institute on the same day in 1951. We served as trustees for many years.

In 1956 I was appointed, and subsequently confirmed by the voters, a member of the San Francisco Board of Education. I served for ten years, from '57 through '67, as a member of the board. Unfortunately, the meetings of the trustees of the Mechanics' Institute and the meetings of the board of education were both held on Tuesday nights. This meant that I missed one out of four meetings of the trustees because I had to go to meetings of the board of education. So I was not able to devote as much time as Theodore Meyer was, and did, to the Mechanics' Institute affairs.

Then in later years Ted Meyer became president of the Mechanics' Institute, and as such became a regent of the University of California, but still continued as president of the Mechanics' Institute, and worked very hard at both jobs.

Teiser: You said that you and Mr. Meyer became trustees of the Mechanics' Institute on the same day in 1951. Then early in 1952 you were elected by the membership.

Moore: That is correct.

Teiser: I noticed that all through the meeting minutes that I read, and I read them from '49 to '77, all trustees were first named by the board of directors and then elected by the membership. None seemed to come on the board by other route. Is that correct?

Moore: No, I don't think that is correct. The board had the power and has the power to fill vacancies which occur at any time during the year. Then there is a nominating committee which nominates the official slate. However, at the annual meeting any member may be proposed as a candidate for election to the board. That happened on a number of occasions.

- Moore: I think the first one who was not on the official slate who was elected was just a very few years ago. I believe that until about five or six years ago none of the candidates who had been nominated by the board was defeated, although on many occasions--almost every year for a number of years--there were more candidates on the ballot than there were places to be filled.
- Teiser: In the minutes there were the suggestions from the membership that implied that some members were disgruntled. Here, in 1953, was a suggestion for a quiet room and for a discussion group room. I think some of the members thought the library was too noisy, and others thought that there wasn't a place to talk. So they wanted it resolved this way. Do you remember that?
- Moore: I vaguely remember that particular incident. But I find nothing wrong with this. I think this is democracy. That's what the board of trustees is for, to try and listen to what their constituency wants and do what they want if it seems appropriate, and not do it if there are other reasons that make it seem inappropriate. I don't have any quarrel with this at all.
- Teiser: Did the board respond to such requests frequently?
- Moore: On every occasion that I can remember when various individuals or groups would make suggestions, the board would carefully consider them and weigh all the pros and cons. It's very, very seldom that in that organization, or in any other in my experience, you don't find that while one person thinks that a certain course of action is the ideal one, there are always others who feel equally strongly that that should not be done. I think that the job of any board of trustees, or regents, or directors--that's one of the main responsibilities, to try and reconcile the needs and wishes and demands of all the people that they're answering to.
- Teiser: As I remember, the reason the board turned down this suggestion that there be a quiet room and another discussion room was lack of space.
- Moore: I remember that very vaguely, and I would just have to assume that that was the reason for turning it down. But I don't really know.
- Teiser: The next event that I noted that was of importance was the centennial celebration in 1955. That must have been quite a grand occasion.
- Moore: It was a very important occasion in the history of the Mechanics' Institute. Mr. Theodore Meyer read a very interesting paper on that occasion, which has a great deal of information and which was, in my opinion, excellent, witty and very informative.*

*See Appendix A.

Teiser: And the hundred year history was published. Was that a time for reassessment, or simply celebration?

Moore: As I remember it it was a time for reassessment, to realize we've come a long way but which way are we going in the future. There was a good deal of reassessment.

Library Progress

Teiser: You've mentioned using the library as a boy and then occasionally later. The content of the library--whether it should be fiction or engineering, general reference or whatever--it surely had to change over the years in response to the people who used it. Was that often discussed by the trustees?

Moore: It was primarily the function of the library committee. They reported at every meeting. The trustees would discuss it at every meeting. After all, the most important function, in my opinion, of a library is to provide the people with what they need and what they want. It was always a matter of priorities. If, let's say, the Chemical Abstracts, they found, were being used by one or two people and they cost two or three thousand dollars a year to keep them on the shelves, then you have to ask yourself, "Well,--is it worth it?"
##

Moore: Any board, that must be one of their main tasks. That certainly was given great consideration by the trustees--I'm sure still is--and may be one of the reasons that the Mechanics' Institute has prospered over the years and has remained viable and active, because it is giving people what they want and what they need, and what they cannot get, at least with anything like equal facility, from any other source.

Teiser: I suppose now there are new technologies that weren't even considered then.

Moore: Well, there are. But I'm one of those who thinks that what is coming in the future for libraries dwarfs everything that's happened in the past. I think that by the year 2000 we wouldn't recognize the library as it is today. I think that will be one of the challenges for the Mechanics' Institute and all other libraries to face in the years to come.

Teiser: It will surely be harder for a small library, I should think--

Moore: I should think, too.

Reiser: --than for a large one. I know Stanford and Berkeley are pooling some of their resources, and electronic means of gathering information.

Moore: They are, yes.

Well, the Mechanics' Institute is--essentially its main function is the maintenance and operation of the library. But as you know, it didn't start out as a library at all. It was an educational institution. It was giving, then, education in the trades and arts at a time when public education really did not exist in this area. It filled a need then which no one else could fill. It's now filling a need in the specialized part of education that no one else, apparently, has been able to fill. People have to pay money to belong to it. They do not have to pay much, if anything, to belong to the San Francisco Public Library, or if they're a student, to any of the university libraries. The Mechanics' Institute, in my opinion, can only continue to exist if it can give service that people cannot get elsewhere.

Teiser: I must say, the dues are very low in the Mechanics' Institute.

Moore: Yes. They were kept at six dollars a year for over a hundred and ten years, I think. A one dollar initiation fee. That had to go, reluctantly, but it did go.

Teiser: They're not very high now.

Moore: It's, I think, twelve now.

Teiser: This is one of the things that I think must have, perhaps, come in during the time you were serving on the board: corporate or special memberships for "Friends" of the Institute.

Moore: The corporate memberships and the Friends are two very different things.

The friends is a matter of tax law. You cannot give to a non-profit organization if you receive any benefit from it. Friends give without getting anything for it at all. The corporate memberships are memberships for companies that use the library--whose people might use the library. For instance, there are several companies in the financial area. Our only competition there was--and I've read recently that the downtown branch of the San Francisco Public Library has closed or is going to close.* But it's always

*The threatened closing did not take place.

Moore: been so crowded, and we have a very complete business library. We have the Wall Street Journal, the Dow Jones, the Standard and Poor's, and so forth.

A corporate membership is a good thing for a corporation who needs that information for its employees.*

Teiser: Could a corporation have a corporate membership to meet its needs, and then also be a friend?

Moore: Several are, yes.

Teiser: Were those concepts initiated during your period on the board?

Moore: Yes.

Teiser: Who was instrumental in that, do you know, or were all of you?

Moore: I think Ted Meyer as much as anyone. I can't say that any particular individual was.

Teiser: Did it help a good deal financially?

Moore: Yes, it did. As far as people giving money to the Mechanics' Institute--there was nothing new about that. People have been making donations to the Mechanics' Institute--in fact, the founding fathers made donations. But the idea of a formalized group of friends did come up during that period.

Teiser: Back to the members' suggestions to the board. At one point they suggested that the board minutes be made available to the members. That was in 1957. The board turned the suggestion down. But many years later, in 1971, it okayed it. It seemed to me that often--and maybe I'm wrong--suggestions were turned down at first and then, eventually, something was done about them.

Moore: That may well be true.

Teiser: Also in 1957 they asked that the treasurer's report be made available to them and that the record of trustees' attendance at meetings be made available to them. Someone must have been disgruntled.

Moore: I don't remember the details of those controversies, if they were controversies. But it appears eventually most of the requests were complied with. I don't recall why they were against it, or if they were against it. I really can't answer that.

*See also pp. 39-40

Teiser: There was another similar one. In 1958 there was a suggestion that the furniture be replaced. Eventually that was done, not then but later.

Leaders and Dissidents

Teiser: Mr. William G. Merchant was president when you went on the board, was he?

Moore: Yes, he was.

Teiser: What sort of man was he?

Moore: I knew Mr. Merchant quite well because he had served on the San Francisco Recreation and Park Commission with my wife for a period of years. Before that he was on the Recreation Commission of the city before it was merged with the Park Commission to become the Recreation and Park Commission. My wife served on that also. He was a very devoted, dedicated, interesting man and a very well thought of architect, as far as I know. He did a great deal of work in the areas of park work, zoo work. I don't know whether he ever did any work for universities. But he was president of the Mechanics' Institute for many, many years.

Teiser: He must have been very valuable with his specific knowledge?

Moore: I'm sure he was. The necessity of completely doing over the Mechanics' Institute building--putting in new elevators, spending a lot of money which we didn't really have, but we had to do the work--came up after he had died.

Teiser: In 1961 he resigned as president, and the following year he died.

Moore: Oh, yes.

Teiser: Some modernization had been underway by then, according to the minutes.

Moore: I'm sure there have been some modernization. However, the real big modernization program came somewhat later.

Teiser: I'm going down my notes chronologically. In 1962 there was a real members' revolt. Some people suggested that the Mechanics' Institute return to an earlier tradition and give lectures and be a cultural force in the community.

Moore: Yes. I do remember that.

Teiser: Do you remember Mrs. Anna Blake Mezquida? She seemed to be at the head of the--

Moore: No, I do not remember her. I thought there was some different people.

Teiser: There were others.

Moore: There was a man named Hanley, who I thought was the leader of that revolt.

Teiser: She was chairman of the Members' Committee. The people it recommended included James Q. Brett, who was on the board, I believe, and said he didn't want to be their candidate.

Moore: James Q. Brett succeeded Theodore Meyer as president of the Institute, and also as a regent of the University of California, but only stayed on nine months and then resigned, and I was elected president.

The others suggested by the group were Robert E. Burger, Dr. Mark W. Eudy, Dr. Ralph Hultgren, A.F. Manspeaker, Guthrie McClain, and Spencer Van Gelder. Manspeaker was already a member of the board, and Hultgren was elected a member later.* He was a University of California professor. I think he is still on the board, but he was nominated I think the next year and became a trustee. Manspeaker was investment manager of Stanford University.

Teiser: Henry Gross was the secretary of this Members' Committee. Arthur E. Wilkens then responded to their--

Moore: Wilkens was the president of the Mechanics' Institute and a University of California Regent following Merchant, and died about a year later. Arthur Wilkens--did it say that he was still a member of the board in 19--

Teiser: --'62.

Moore: Oh yes, that's right. He was for about three or four years, I guess.**

Teiser: There was also a Members' Committee for Re-election of Incumbent Trustees then; that was Jerd F. Sullivan, Jr., Marsden Blois, Robert S. Cathcart, Jesse Steinhart, Sam P. Eastman, King Harris, Frederick U. Wier.

*Hultgren served as a trustee from 1962 until 1980.

**Wilkens served as a trustee from 1948 until his death in 1963.

Moore: They were supporting the incumbents, as I remember.

Teiser: Yes. It must have caused some discussion and unrest to have such an unknown group speak up so loud.

Moore: I don't know that they were unknown. They were dissident. I have no quarrel with this at all. I think that [if] people don't like what's going on they should try to get elected to the board.

Teiser: They wanted a return to cultural leadership in the city. But they also wanted classes in foreign languages. And fairs again, like the old Mechanics' Institute fairs, with medals and awards and lectures. They wanted changes toward the past.

Moore: They also wanted to get elected. [laughter]

Teiser: Yes. [laughter]

In that same year Theodore Meyer was elected president of the board of trustees. The next year Dr. Henry Gibbons was elected to the board. He seemed to have been very active.

Moore: He has been very active over the years.

Teiser: He seemed to have a feeling for involving membership in celebrations. He was willing to spend the time to celebrate Library Week with special events, and some sort of Christmas tea or concert.

Moore: He's been a very strong member. Done a wonderful job. I think he is no longer a member of the board.

Teiser: Did many of the trustees have such special interests?

Moore: I would say yes. There were always one or two who were particularly interested in chess activities. There were several who were interested in the business activities--taking care of the portfolio of the investments of the institution. There were others who were on the professional side of librarianship. Some actually espoused the reader's cause in library affairs--the consumer, you might say--and took an interest to be sure that we were giving everybody as close to what they needed or what they could have as possible. Yes, I think that there was a degree--. I think this is true of most boards of directors and trustees.

Teiser: What was Mr. Meyer's special interest?

Moore: I would say he would be, in that sense, a universalist. He was really interested in the welfare of the Mechanics' Institute. He did everything he could in every area to make it go.

Teiser: I notice that apparently he wasn't called upon for legal advice, that they would have committees or call in someone on legal questions.

Moore: In my experience that's the way that most voluntary organizations are run. In my experience, also, it's the way they should be run. It's the same old story. A doctor who is his own doctor has a fool for a patient. The same thing is said in law. I think that's the way it should be.

Teiser: What were your special interests?

Moore: I wouldn't say that I had any special interests of that kind. I was interested, and still am, in all aspects of the Institute.

Teiser: You served on many committees from time to time.

Moore: Yes. We all served on committees. Usually we'd change from one to another. There were certain people, as I said, who were--. Mr. Bagby* was the chairman of the chess committee for, I guess, thirty or forty years. But generally speaking we would serve on several committees.

Teiser: I think I've made a list of some of them you were on: finance, membership, organization and planning, and publicity and printing. Probably others, too. How did these committees work?

Moore: They worked in a variety of ways. All the committees were important, but the library committee had, certainly, to meet more often than the printing committee and that type of activity. They would meet, at least most of the time, twice a month at the library, usually in the afternoon--sometimes the afternoon of which we were going to have a meeting that evening. The other committees would usually meet on an ad hoc basis. The finance committee, which handled the portfolio, met at least twice a week over most of the time that I was on the board. The other committees would meet less regularly, on an as-needed basis, as I remember it. That must have varied over the years, but I think that was the general pattern.

Teiser: Would you say that most of the board's work was done in the committees?

Moore: I think that's an oversimplification. I know it's true of many organizations, whether it's our legislature or the UC Regents, or any other organization, that the nuts and bolts are sorted out in the committees. But the committees have no authority to do anything. The board--or trustees, in this case--has to decide whether the committee has made a correct decision, and whether to go along that way. I don't think you can simplify it to that extent.

*Charles Bagby

Teiser: Did the board turn down many recommendations?

Moore: I don't remember that they did. I think it would be unusual if they did. This is a very small board, you know. Only fourteen members.

Teiser: You all had to work hard.

Moore: Well, I have found it to be one of the most dedicated groups, and I've served on many boards of many organizations, both public and private, over a long lifetime. I think it's outstanding.

The Chess Room

Teiser: You said that Mr. Bagby was in charge of the chess room.

Moore: No. I think I said he was chairman of the chess committee.

Teiser: Yes. I'm sorry. It must have been even more troublesome than the Lalanne leases. Chess room problems were constantly coming up in the board meetings.

Moore: Well, the chess room--sometimes they called it a chess club--is an activity of the Mechanics' Institute, but not the main activity. The main activity by far is the library. The chess operation is highly specialized. Most of the people who use the chess room are members of the Mechanics' Institute, really, only for that purpose. The ones that use both the library and the chess room--there are some, but not very many. The Mechanics' Institute chess room has become a place where, I think you'll find if you ask anyone, some of the finest chess on the Pacific Coast is played. We've had great life masters play there, and we've always had a director who was one of the top people in the United States. It's so different that you could hardly expect the average trustee of the Mechanics' Institute, who comes on because he thinks it's a library, to know much about chess. It was for that reason that Mr. Bagby was our chairman of the committee.

Another member who I've mentioned already--Dr. Hultgren--who was originally proposed as part of the dissident slate, and either the next year or two years later was elected by the trustees--in fact, he was elected to fill a vacancy which had occurred--he was one of those who was a member of the chess department and also was very interested in the library, and became one of the finest trustees we had. So, there was some liaison between the chess and the library. But essentially they're two quite different functions.

Moore: They were members of the Institute but their purpose in joining was to play chess there. There, again, they could get something that they could get practically nowhere else. The opportunity to take lessons from our directors, and to play with some of the top chess players on the Pacific Coast, who came from up and down the coast to play there, is rare. There is no other place that I know of around here that they could get that. They, naturally, felt that more of the resources of the Institute should be--this is something that is going on in our daily life and our national life--that there should be more funds expended on the chess room than on the library. I think that 90 percent of the discussions that you have read about deal with that aspect.

Teiser: Well, no. There were constant requests for funds, but there were also reports of disputes, sometimes verging on physical combat, in the chess room.

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Moore: They're all very intelligent people. If they were not they would not be good chess players. And they are highly tempermental, in my experience. They did get into arguments. Some of them played fast and objected to the use--. As you probably know, in high-power chess they use chess clocks. You set the clock. You can set twenty minutes, or fifteen minutes, or half an hour for the move. Sometimes they would think that their opponent had taken thirty-two minutes instead of thirty. Anyway, there are all kinds of arguments that went on. This was not as likely to happen in the library. I do remember there were lots of arguments like that.

Teiser: Someone was expelled from the room and Casper Weinberger, who was a member of the board, had to go and talk with him and urge him not to sue the organization.

Moore: There were a number of those occasions. I suppose there may still be. I don't know. But the Mechanics' Institute survived all of those crises.

Teiser: One of the things that happened in the '60s that must have, I would guess, helped the Institute's finances was the initiation of charter flights to Europe. Did the Mechanics' Institute make a little money from its charter flights?

Moore: That was a very interesting activity. The Mechanics' Institute did make some money. Not much money from the flights, but at the low schedule of dues--six dollars a year and one dollar initiation--it led to a great many new members. So it was very helpful to the Mechanics' Institute, because we were able to offer at that time lower charter flight prices than almost any other organization. The Mechanics' Institute was a real pioneer in that activity.

Moore: I think that a lot of the credit for that goes to Eileen Cook. She really worked most of it out. But, it did lead to many, many new members.

Teiser: I remember going on those flights.

Moore: The price was right compared to what it is now.

Teiser: I should say.

In 1966 the board passed a list of rules governing the conduct of members in the library. Did that imply a breakdown in the social mores that required--?

Moore: Well, as I remember it this was a time when the counter culture was beginning to thrive, and people were doing things in every activity in their lives that they would not have thought of doing in years gone by. There were certain activities, particularly in the way of disturbances, that the board felt were not conducive to the operation of a proper library function. I think it was more a matter of loud talk and disruption than it was of dress and that sort of thing.

Elections

Teiser: You mentioned that the students at the university--

Moore: The University of California, Berkeley students--somebody on The Daily Cal got the idea during the period of student unrest--the '60s--that they could get a member on the university board by having control of the election of the president of the Mechanics' Institute. They figured out that we had about five thousand two hundred members, I think. They figured that if they could get twenty-seven hundred--I think it was--members, that they would be able to elect a regent of the university--the president of the Mechanics' Institute.

So they sent over to the Mechanics' Institute for application forms. We sent a hundred because we wanted more members. The Mechanics' Institute was at that time--I guess it still is--the easiest organization in the world there is to join. You simply sent in seven dollars. One dollar for an initiation fee, and six dollars for a year's membership. Then you will have to fill out a form which is signed by two people--they don't have to be members--any two people who will certify that you are a person of good character. That's all there is.

Moore: So, we sent this over and they then printed it in The Daily Cal--a facsimile of our membership application--and stated that if anyone wished to join--any student--they would send them one of our applications and the student would send in a check for seven dollars. They would then hold the check and the application in the student body office until they received twenty-seven hundred. They would take it from there. Then they would take control of the Mechanics' Institute and vote in whoever they wanted as the president of the Mechanics' Institute, who would become a regent of the University of California.

Well, it turned out to be the old story, that a lot of people are going to do a lot of things until they have to put their money where their mouth is. In this case we agreed, in order to get more members, that they didn't need to use our form. We would accept the box in The Daily Cal. But the net result as near as I've ever been able to ascertain was they actually got seventeen students who sent in the applications with checks. So, of course, they sent them back after about a year. This thing would keep being printed in The Daily Cal. Of those seventeen, two of the students sent them over to the Mechanics' Institute--said they did want to be members. They were elected members. Of those two, one girl later said she didn't really want to join. She got her money back. The net result of this immense amount of effort was one new member for the Mechanics' Institute [laughter] It's really a wonder!

Teiser: [laughter] I never knew that before.

Moore: I think it's interesting, though. You know how many people are going to do all these things. But when you ask them to put a check up, why, that's something else.

Teiser: Later, of course, there was a student member elected directly to the Board of Regents.

Moore: Well, that's a different--yes.

Teiser: The same result came directly much later.

Moore: Well, I don't think they necessarily thought they would elect a student as president of the Mechanics' Institute. I don't know. They would have elected someone they thought would do their bidding.

I think the theory of an organization trying to take over another organization, in order to work its will on another organization, is completely wrong. The Mechanics' Institute, the only connection it has with the University of California--or did have for over a hundred years--was the fact that its president was a regent of the University of California. There never was any other

Moore: connection. It's been very interesting to me over the years that the trustees of the Mechanics' Institute, from the very beginning, took very seriously the idea of the founding fathers--that the president of the Mechanics' Institute being a regent was one way that the Board of Regents would have one person at least who had no commitment to anyone and was not beholden to anyone. Therefore, the Mechanics' Institute trustees have never in all my years--and I'm told this has happened before--asked the president what he did as a regent of the University of California. They never, never, never--. There was never any discussion of it. This is something that's very rare and that very few people have ever realized, I think. I think the Mechanics' Institute president being a regent brought regents over the years to the university who had far less commitment--nobody appointed them; the governor or nobody else.

That's why I thought it was wrong for people like the students, or anybody else, to try and take over the Mechanics' Institute with no interest at all in the Mechanics' Institute. You should not become a trustee of the Mechanics' Institute unless you're interested in the Mechanics' Institute. Not because you are interested to achieve some other result as a regent of the University of California.

[Interview 2: July 14, 1982]##

Teiser: Early in the 1970s the members had a loud and noisy revolt that seemed to be an effort to put Robert G. Sproul, Jr. on the board.

Moore: As I remember it, he was a candidate.

Teiser: He was nominated by the members.

Moore: Yes.

Teiser: A group of members--Doris Muscatine was one--

Moore: I remember her, yes.

Teiser: --I don't know that their desires were any different from those that had been expressed earlier.

Moore: Well, the desires that they expressed were varied. There was one group that felt that the investment portfolio of the endowment fund might have been handled in a different way. Others felt that there should be more emphasis on different types of books. More, some felt, on the technical side and some felt on the fictional, entertainment reading side. Others felt at one time or another that there should be more emphasis on chess. I cannot remember what, in that particular case where Mr. Sproul was a candidate, was their main item of concern. I don't know that.

Moore: I cannot and I will not speculate as to anyone's motives. You'd have to ask Mr. Sproul or anyone else what they--.

Teiser: I wasn't thinking so much of that as of what their specific desires were as expressed. They seemed to want to change the system of electing members to the board of trustees. I assumed that that was simply an expression of dissatisfaction with something that they believed had gone wrong.

Moore: I think that in order to express their concerns to a point that they would get somewhere in electing an outsider, it would be necessary to get what one might call a coalition of people who were dissatisfied with this, that, or the other thing. I think you will find that in most organizations. It's difficult for the board of trustees to run any organization so that somebody doesn't have some complaint about something. There are many different facets to the Mechanics' Institute operations. If you can mobilize enough people who think that enough is wrong in various areas, I think that would be the best way to go about it.

Teiser: I belong to another organization that's not unlike it, except that it lacks a large endowment. Over the years there has been much muttering among members, but there's never been an organized movement among them. I was trying to compare the two. Of course that organization has a much more fluctuating board of directors.

Moore: I think it's fair to say that the Mechanics' Institute has had many people who've stayed on the board for many years, and the number of new faces appearing has been lower than you would find in most organizations.

In fact, I think this may have been an indication that the Mechanics' Institute is something quite special. Because in many other organizations it's not a question of keeping people off or trying to have the same people go back. You will have trouble in keeping the same people on the boards and trying to get new people. That has not been the case, generally speaking, in the Mechanics' Institute.

Teiser: What were the mechanics of nominating a new trustee? I noticed in the minutes that a trustee would say he was going to retire, then another trustee would be nominated. There was no indication of how that new nomination was made.

Moore: In the Mechanics' Institute, like many other organizations, the board has the authority to fill vacancies that occur between the annual meetings of the membership of the corporation under California law and under the charter of the Mechanics' Institute. The Mechanics'

Moore: Institute Board of Trustees, when I was on it, would adopt the policy of looking around and trying to determine someone who had showed promise and who would be interested.

You may have noticed--and I think I mentioned before--that on several occasions the trustees elected people who had been among the dissidents at earlier elections. There were several cases of that. That showed, in the opinion of the trustees, that that person had evidenced some interest and could be looked upon to contribute something.

Teiser: I assume there was time between the knowledge that the one trustee was going to retire and the actual naming of the next, for the board to look around and think.

Moore: I really can't remember. That happened several times during my tenure, but I don't remember how much time--

Teiser: Was there a nominating committee within the board, or was there an executive session held about it?

Moore: I don't remember that.

Libraries and Library Users

Teiser: From time to time in the minutes there were reports from trustees who had gone to other cities or even to other countries and visited other private libraries, to compare them with the Mechanics' Institute library.

Moore: There's a Mechanics' Institute in New York I visited. In fact, I think I made a report at one time of a visit that I made to the one in New York.* It may not appear in the minutes, but--

Teiser: I believe it did. I can see that there was a good deal of thought upon the part of the trustees on the position of the private library in America today--in the world today. What general thoughts do you have on it? You spoke a little about this earlier, but I'd like to have any other thoughts that you have.

*See also pp. 24-25.

Moore: I think that the Mechanics' Institute library has been and is able to bring something to its members that they cannot get from public libraries, or educational institution libraries. That is, they're so much closer, in my opinion. There is more relation between what members need and want and what the librarian and the library can bring to them, than is possible in a city library or a university library, or a school department. The idea of open stacks so that they can see what's there--. There's nothing to compare with open stacks that you can get in most libraries. I think that's the function that the Mechanics' Institute has been able to fill and, hopefully, will be able to continue.

When I was on the board the library--I shouldn't call it the library; it's the Mechanics' Institute and its library--I always tried to be responsive to what was needed and what special services we could give to special groups even though they might be small in number.

I remember one time a girl student at UC Berkeley, studying Hebraic studies, stood up at one of our annual meetings and told how she had three books that she needed and she couldn't get them anywhere--the Berkeley library or anywhere else. She told her problems to the Mechanics' Institute librarian and they were purchased. That was, we thought, a very wonderful example of really outstanding service to a very, very small constituency.

Teiser: Yes. It is, I suppose, a narrower group than uses a public library. Have you ever tried characterizing the membership? Other than the chess players which you characterized quite well for us. The library users--can you tell us what kind of group they are?

Moore: They're not a homogeneous group at all. As I said, there are many--in fact, I suppose most of them--who have special interests. I mentioned, I think, one group--the people in the financial community in Montgomery Street and all that area--whose main interest is in the business periodicals, Standard & Poor's, The Wall Street Journal and all the rest of it. There are some students--I just mentioned one type--who can find things in their particular areas that they cannot find in the ordinary libraries. There are a great many people who I'm sure are interested primarily, if not entirely, in the pleasure reading side of it. There it becomes a matter of dollars and cents. They can get almost anything they want. Maybe not everything, but nearly everything, at a much more advantageous cost than they can by going to neighborhood, privately owned circulating libraries. Then there are others who are students of specialized technical fields. I don't mean actually students but whose work, whether it's with a large corporation, falls into expertise and knowledge of the on-coming bits of knowledge in various areas. I mentioned that some of the large corporations have corporation memberships for that purpose.

- Moore: So, I don't think you could characterize them in any way. They're all people who want and need what the Mechanics' Institute offers.
- Teiser: In relatively recent years, I think, corporations have organized their own libraries, especially of technical materials.
- Moore: Our present librarian, Mrs. Pabst, came to us from the Utah Construction Company library. Sure. Standard Oil, many companies have them.
- Teiser: Has their development of their libraries changed the necessity for the Mechanics' Institute to carry certain kinds of materials?
- Moore: It may be that it has. I couldn't give you any specifics. But, however, the fact that the Standard Oil Company has a library wouldn't make it necessary for the Mechanics' Institute to have some of the things they have for others who do not work for the Standard Oil Company. That's kind of a difficult question.
- Teiser: I did a great deal of research on the Bethlehem Steel Company shipyards, the background up to World War II. I remember the periodicals--mechanical engineering, technical, within the whole field. I don't think any place but the Mechanics' Institute had them.
- Moore: That's interesting. That was my business, you know. Ship building and ship repair. I didn't know that.
- Teiser: I don't know if they still have them or not. Perhaps there's little interest now. That's another thing. There was a good deal of emphasis on the mechanical arts at one time.
- Moore: Oh, that was really the reason why the Mechanics' Institute was founded.
- Teiser: But now what about electronics?
- Moore: I'm not qualified to tell you how far they've gone now.
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- Teiser: There were comparable libraries in other cities?
- Moore: Well, I can only comment on the Mechanics' Institute name really. I don't know whether we've discussed it but the mechanics' institute movement was a child of the industrial revolution. It was impossible for young men who were learning their trades to take courses in mechanical drawing, even in arithmetic and mathematics, and become master mechanics and superintendents and executives. They banded together, or those who had come up from that did, and

Moore: founded the mechanics' institutes which did fill that need. As time went by, public education both here and in Europe took over a lot of those functions, and that function was no longer as necessary for the mechanics' institute, and they got into other fields. But in the middle of the last century there were something like one hundred and fifty, as I remember it, in the United States, and more than that in England and Germany and other countries of Europe. To my knowledge--I haven't checked it lately--there were only two that still carry on under that name in the United States, the one in San Francisco and the one in New York. I think there are, or there were, two or three, or four in England.

When you ask are there other libraries comparable, I don't really know. I suppose there are. There are other libraries in San Francisco. There's a French library, and the Sutro Library. And then there are also quite a few industrial libraries. There are many law libraries. The Mechanics' Institute is also a library of public deposit. Do you know that? You sign a contract with the Library of Congress and you agree to--you don't have to take everything but you get lists of everything that's published and you take what you want. You have to agree to keep it for--I guess there's no time limit. The Mechanics' Institute does take quite a bit of that material. The largest one in San Francisco I guess is the public library. Another very large one is the library of the Ninth District Court of Appeals of the United States Judiciary in San Francisco. It's a library of deposit.

As I understand it, these other public or private libraries are all eligible to become members of this system. The same thing is true of all the University of California libraries, and all the university libraries are all members of it.

The Mechanics' Institute also has another function that's quite helpful, and that is they have close relationships with all of the libraries of deposit in the Bay Area--Berkeley and judicial, and all the rest of them. If you want something that ever has been a government publication, a member can call the librarian and she will, if the Mechanics' Institute doesn't have it, almost always be able to find it in one of the Bay Area area libraries of deposit.

Teiser: I see. Can she borrow it for you?

Moore: Yes. I've used it on two or three occasions.

Teiser: I see. That's interesting. That's a great service.

Moore: I suppose that all other libraries of deposit do the same, but I'm only familiar with this one. They're quite a closely knit group, librarians. They work together well.

Trustees' Responsibilities

Teiser: That brings me to another very large question. An organization with an adequate endowment--

Moore: No organization that I've ever been connected with ever would admit or even does have an adequate endowment.

Teiser: [laughter] I'll amend that. An organization with an endowment--the question of the relationship of the organization as a whole to the members who join voluntarily but pick up only part of the tab for the cost of the membership. I'm sure that causes friction; that the members think, if I've paid my dues then I ought to have a say in this.

Moore: I have no quarrel with that. I think that's democracy.

Teiser: Yes, but the trustees must also protect, I suppose, the total investment or the total organization so that the members can go on benefiting.

Moore: Well, I'm sure that's true. But I don't think it's unique to the Mechanics' Institute. That's universal I think. It's natural for the "ins" to think that they will do a better job than the "outs."

Teiser: Well, I don't really quite mean that. I mean that the trustees are really in a position of trust in an organization of this kind. They sit, without fee, to administer funds and keep it going. They have one point of view while, sometimes, some of the members have another. The same thing occurred in the university when the students thought they could run the university better than the regents or the faculty.

Moore: I think it's very healthy. I think it would not be healthy if everybody was satisfied with everything that was going on. This keeps people on their toes and makes those who do become trustees more determined to do the right thing and do the best they can, I think. I find nothing wrong with this at all.

Teiser: You spoke a little of Mr. Meyer. Do you think of any way of characterizing his contribution to the Mechanics' Institute?

Moore: I know that he contributed more to the well-being of the Mechanics' Institute during his tenure as a trustee than any other individual by far. His tenure started the same day as mine did, as we have noted. Mine ended a few years after he died.

Moore: When he retired as president of the Mechanics' Institute he still remained as a trustee for several more years. Even until the last year of his life--he was in very bad and deteriorating health--he maintained an active interest and came to some of the meetings. Mr. Meyer, when he resigned as president of the Board of Trustees, was succeeded by James Q. Brett, who served for nine months and then resigned as president. Then I was elected president.

Teiser: Did you have to consider carefully whether you could give that much extra time to the organization?

Moore: I did consider it carefully, yes. The presidency of the Mechanics' Institute takes quite a bit of time. Being a Regent of the University of California takes considerable time. But being chairman of the Board of Regents of the University takes an incomparably greater amount of time. That was true particularly during the time that Ted Meyer was president of the Institute. For two years height of the student unrest he became chairman of the Board of Regents. He's the only--I'm not sure of that, but at least in the last forty years he's the only president of the trustees who has become chairman of the Board of Regents at the same time. Therefore, Ted Meyer gave unquestionably much more time and effort. Indeed, most of his time was taken up with the work at Berkeley and the university, and his work in the Mechanics' Institute, which was going through a period of rebuilding the building. That took an awful lot of time. He was helped by some of the trustees who had expertise in that field.

I never had those two jobs together. Ted Meyer did. So my difficulties with time were not at all comparable to his.

Teiser: You became chairman of the Board of Regents after you had ceased serving as president of the Mechanics' Institute?

Moore: Oh yes. And after I'd ceased being a trustee of the Mechanics' Institute.

Teiser: I guess Mr. Meyer must have indeed devoted almost his whole time to those duties.

Moore: Yes. I would say he did. As I said and told you, I am not familiar with his activities on the Board of Regents. I think I explained the reason why. But I am familiar with the amount of time that he took. He was my personal attorney over a long period of time, including that period, and he was our company's attorney for many years. Yet he was always able to give me time in my personal and our company affairs--and we had some problems at that time which required his attention--although I knew he was extremely busy on these other activities. But he was that kind of a guy.

TAPE GUIDE -- Joseph A. Moore

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KATHLEEN PABST



Kathleen Pabst
Standing at the card catalogue in the
second floor library reading room,
Mechanics' Institute

The Background of the Library

[Date of Interview: September 30, 1982]##

Teiser: I should ask you perhaps first a little about your background. Are you a University of California library school graduate?

Pabst: Yes, I am. And I have also an undergraduate degree from UC Berkeley, and one from Durham University in England.

Teiser: I gather that you come originally from England?

Pabst: Yes, but I've been in the Bay Area twenty-five years. I've been in the downtown area close to twenty.

Teiser: I believe that before coming to the Mechanics' Institute you were librarian in a corporate library?

Pabst: Yes, Utah International. I was their corporate librarian, and I also worked for Standard Oil. And I did government work in an oceanography library and some public library work in Marin County, where I lived at one point. I was a member of Mechanics' Institute before I became librarian, so I used to come in here frequently. The name was familiar to me, having come from the north of England where there was always a mechanics' institute in every industrial town, and I suppose this is where the name originates.

Teiser: They continued that recently?

Pabst: No, they were really replaced and amalgamated with the public library systems. The mechanics' institutes in England were really a little bit different from this Mechanics' Institute. They were dedicated to the education of the working man, and they were there

##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 21.

Pabst: for, say the coal miner who wanted to attend evening school classes, to offer drafting lessons or the rudiments of a technical education to the people who were of the working class.

Teiser: This originally, I believe, was similar.

Pabst: I think that the idea may have been there in the beginning, but then it turned into something that was much more like a private membership club to a lot of people in San Francisco. And I have wondered myself whether or not this came about when there was a merging of the Mercantile Library with this library, which happened just prior to the earthquake in January 1906. The Mercantile was a collection, a highly prized collection, of books and works of art in books. After the trustees decided to merge these two collections, the Mercantile Library collection was moved here in January, and you know what happened in April. Now, had the Mercantile collection remained where it was, it never would have been destroyed. That building was untouched by the earthquake. It was one of the better collections on the west coast, the Mercantile. The people who belonged to that association tended to be people who were interested in humanities and the arts. And I just wonder if with that amalgamation of the membership, there wasn't a different emphasis to some extent put on the collection from that time forward. I wonder if Mechanics' Institute had not been a little more technical before that amalgamation, and maybe much more in line with the old mechanics' institutes in England and Scotland. I have no way of backing this up, but that would be my theory, anyway.

Teiser: I remember I was doing research on shipbuilding in this area, and I found here volumes of early periodicals on civil engineering and mechanical engineering and all kinds of technical periodicals. I don't think the university has them all, or anybody else.

Pabst: That's true. We do get requests from UC Berkeley and other engineering schools to borrow some of these older materials.

Of course, a lot of the original Mechanics' collection was lost in the earthquake, so it was an enterprising librarian at that time who managed to put back so many titles. And I think it's a nice story--I say story, it's undoubtedly true--that he went to the nearest telegraph office and telegraphed libraries all over the country, and I think some overseas, and said, "You know what's happened in San Francisco," and "I need books." And they responded. I think that within a few months we had a library.

Teiser: Was this a total loss?

Pabst: As far as I know. We have a few books that were singed, and some old membership records but most of the collection was lost. I have a few notes on the history of the library, which I can give to you.* I think it mentions what was saved, but it was very little.

Teiser: You then came in 1974?

Pabst: Yes.

Teiser: What time of a year was it?

Pabst: Winter.

Teiser: Mr. Robert Michalske had--

Pabst: December. Mr. Michalske had gone. I did not know him at that time. I met him some two years later, I think when he came back from Southern California. But I didn't know him at the time that I came to Mechanics' as librarian.

Teiser: Mr. Norman Green had been acting librarian in between?

Pabst: He had, and he was still here for a couple of months after I came in.

Teiser: So you had some help?

Pabst: Well, not really. I wouldn't say so. I think there was the need to start moving the library in a little different path, and, after all, Mr. Green had really not been head librarian for very long himself, so when he was brought back into this interim period, he wasn't engaged in any kind of administration. He was really--what shall I say?--in a holding pattern, just keeping everything together. That's about all. I think I spent the first few months just listening and looking and trying to fill in the gaps that I wasn't aware of as far as the government of the library was concerned.

I was fairly familiar with the collection, because I had been coming to the library for a good two years almost every day. And so as a librarian I had been aware that there were gaps in the collection and especially in the non-fiction collection.

Teiser: What area of non-fiction particularly?

Pabst: The technical areas were neglected. It would be easier to say what area hadn't been neglected, really. Although it was fast becoming outdated, the descriptive literature of geographical areas was in

*See Appendix B

Pabst: fairly good shape, and the art section was not too badly off. But literature and, as I say, the technical areas, they were outdated and lacked continuity.

Now the scientific areas I don't know I can say too much about, because there really wasn't a collection--just random titles. As I found out, there is not the interest amongst the membership in a science collection, and we're not financially able to do it well enough, so that it's much better to let the academic institutions do it who can sustain a scientific collection much better than we can. And we can borrow from them for occasional use.

Teiser: What about popular science?

Pabst: That we do have to have. I mean, titles such as the Double Helix. But I'm thinking more in the scientific areas of biology and chemistry. Our neighborhood is really the financial district, and people from Standard Oil who may be interested in chemistry would use their own library, which is an excellent library and serves that community very well. They would also be amenable to letting us use one of their books if a member of Mechanics' who did not work for Standard Oil needed to see it for a couple of days. I'm sure you know that though the library community is small, the special library community in the downtown area of San Francisco has a very good network. They assist each other a great deal.

Teiser: Are you speaking of special libraries as a generic term, or is there a special libraries group?

Pabst: There is a group. There is an association, the Special Libraries Association, which I'm a member of, and this library, the Mechanics' Institute, was one of the original members and sponsors of the chapter. So Mechanics' always had an organizational membership, but because they had no professional librarians on the staff, they had no individual membership. We have three memberships here now, and we have had for some years. Consequently we get a lot of cooperation from the other librarians or libraries where we need a publication or where we need information.

Teiser: Of course your own experiences in corporate libraries gives you an advantage in knowing where to get material.

Pabst: Yes, that's true, too.

Teiser: You have personal associations, that help you?

Pabst: Yes.

New Users and New Needs

Pabst: I think that there is no doubt that the people who use Mechanics', the constituency, has changed somewhat as far as their needs go. We still do have people who read all kinds of fiction and nonfiction and browse through the stacks, but we also have another group, and this is the group that uses the library heavily, who are the people looking for information. Time is money, and they haven't got time to sit in a library, and they haven't got time to browse, and they want to come in and see a specific reference work, or they want somebody to give them a specific answer to a specific question. It is a sign of the times. So that libraries don't just house books any more; they must also be able to deliver information.

Teiser: What is this group composed of in general? Can you characterize it at all?

Pabst: Well, it would be very easy to say that it's the business community, but it really isn't just the business community. It's the housewife who wants help with her taxes, who wants to know which washing machine to buy. It is the person who wants to do a comparative analysis of various and sundry things that he or she is involved with. It's really not just one specific group. I will say that it's probably those who are involved in a working area who ask for information most often, but it's not necessarily work-oriented information. In other words, I think people today are information oriented. They've come up in a time when libraries are providing information.

Now we still have some of our older members who come in here every day and spend a great deal of time going through newspapers and books, and they've been doing it for years, and they know where certain books are on the shelf, and they like to browse. They want to look at the new books. But, as I say, there's this other group who never browse and really don't want to know where books are. They want you to deliver to them what they need, and they almost want you to tell them what they need.

Teiser: The San Francisco Public Library has an information service. Do you feel that you have to match that?

Pabst: Oh, I think we do better than that. If you're going to do that kind of research, you've really got to do it well. You can't deliver approximate information.

Teiser: For instance, I phone the public library sometimes and say, "Here's a man who's probably in Who's Who. What's his middle initial?" And they find it.

Pabst: I think that sort of quick reference information is something that libraries have always done. That's fine. But where someone comes in and says, "I want to know what percentage of people were earning a certain amount of salary and what portion of that was going in rentals in the cities of Denver, Detroit and Chicago during the years 1933 through '37." Now, actually, what I'm quoting there is still a very easy thing to do, because there are government statistics and they can be easily located. But there are other such questions where there may be several sets of statistics involved, and you must be careful to analyse them accurately.

In what you might say were my formative years in librarianship, we were taught that you had to complete what we called an exhaustive search. One had to look at all the known sources and deliver information and sources. If you had not consulted all sources, you had to make your client aware of the fact that these itemized sources had not been consulted. Now, to be able to do that today, with the amount of demand--there was very little demand comparatively speaking in those days, and we had hours to spend doing it and doing a very thorough job--now you have to employ highly competent librarians and carry the cost of access to computerized data banks.

Teiser: It's information retrieval?

Pabst: Yes. Most public libraries cannot afford the cost of information retrieval that involves a great deal of time and searching. But if it's in a specialized data base, such as Lexis, which is law, or some other specialization, then you're not going to get good and complete information via a public library.

Teiser: Do you have access to such bases?

Pabst: No. We have a terminal, which we use in our cataloguing operation, but we don't have any information retrieval access, because we can't afford it. Membership dues are so low, and we haven't had the demand for this kind of service. Where we have had one or two instances of reference questions where we couldn't supply the information here in the library, we've gone outside for it. We have used the public library information service just to--rather than to give us information--just to make sure it wasn't available.

Teiser: Well, that's rather far from books, isn't it?

Pabst: Yes, that's quite a way from books. But Mechanics' Institute library really is very concerned with books. I frequently say I'm not rushing into any computerized systems because we're perhaps going to be the only library in the Bay Area that deals in books, and that's

Pabst: going to give us a marvelous status and make us unique. I don't think that's true, but we're fortunate that we have close to eight thousand members who still read and read a great deal.

Some of those members also use us for information retrieval. They use us for their work rather than for recreation, as do a number of writers who also use the library on a daily basis.

Teiser: It's so easy to be able to just go to a shelf and take down a book.

Pabst: Yes. Well, you know, that is one area where we are unique, I think, in today's world of libraries. The stacks are open.

Teiser: The San Francisco Public Library, some of their stacks are open.

Pabst: But a lot aren't. And I know in academic libraries today, few stacks are open.

Teiser: Let me go back a little over these last eight years, since you've been here. Was it after you came that the dues were raised to ten dollars?

Pabst: That had just happened before I came, actually.

Teiser: It was a big revolution.

Pabst: It was a big revolution. I voted then as a member that they raise them. And then I remember reading in Herb Caen's column that they were being raised for the first time since the beginning of the library and that it was the best bargain in town, it was only ten dollars per month. In actual fact it was ten dollars a year. I don't know why someone didn't clip his column at that time and keep it here; but I do recall it.

Improvements for Today and Tomorrow

Teiser: You said that the library had its strengths and weaknesses when you became librarian. Did you find general fiction and general literature in good shape?

Pabst: The fiction was in good shape, yes. My feeling was that the bulk of the book budget was going into fiction and multiple copies of certain works, which was very nice for a few members, because they were getting instant delivery of a title. But the first responsibility of the head librarian is the book collection. I know it probably

Pabst: seems to some people that the major responsibility should be staff or systems or something else, but it really is the book collection. And so what I wanted to do was give attention to the other subject areas of the library.

I think my feeling then is the same as it is now. I want to see Mechanics' Institute be a thriving library fifty years down the road, and if that is to be, you must give time and thought not only to today but for the future. You have got to have a collection that will stand up, and I felt that it was dying at that time.

So that's what I've done, which I must say raised the ire of a few members. But after eight years, I think we're still managing to give pretty good delivery of titles without overdoing one particular title to the detriment of other parts of the collection. I think we still provide more service than any public library in the area. I've visited other private libraries in the country, the Mercantile in New York, Mechanics' Institute in New York, the Mercantile in St. Louis. We are by far the healthiest in membership and activity. We're really a success story.

Teiser: Perhaps it's because we're in a very compact city, partly?

Pabst: Yes, and yet we do have a turnover in membership. We have almost eight thousand members now, and I think the only time we had higher membership was when we had a travel program,* and it's decreased somewhat since then. But I think the remarkable thing is that this is a city whose population is decreasing, and yet we have eight thousand members, and twenty years ago we had five thousand. So I think that's a very healthy sign for the Institute. Whereas the New York Mechanics' and Mercantile have gone the other way. They have less than two thousand members.

Teiser: I was reading the minutes, and I noticed that in June, 1975, you gave the board some ideas for plans to sell or get rid of extra books and make more shelf space.

Pabst: I'll tell you what I think that probably refers to. At the time that Crocker Plaza was built, the building that adjoined this building was severed, and I think the Institute basement area suffered some damage. I believe the board of trustees did make a claim against Crocker, and that was settled for an amount of money. But there were some books in the basement that were titles of some consequence but for some reason were housed in a part of the basement where a

*See pp. 17-18

Pabst: leakage of water damaged these volumes. So when I found them, they were in very bad shape. It's infuriating to a librarian to come across such items and find them so abused. It would have taken a great deal of money for us to put them back into shape, and they were not the kind of book that most of the readers were interested in. They probably had been given to the library, or maybe they'd been remnants of that original Mercantile collection. I had no way of knowing. I felt that they shouldn't be left to rot, so what I did was give the board what I considered a choice of either spending money to repair them, and then we would have to house them, or turning them over to the State Library so that people would have access to them.

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Pabst: The board moved that we turn them over to the State Library, the Sutro collection, and that's where they are now. So they are still available to members. Sutro was very pleased to have them, and I would assume that they have been put in good repair.

Teiser: I noticed several months ago in the board room there was quite a nice collection of classics.

Pabst: The Taussig Collection. Mr. Adolph Taussig served on our board and donated a portion of his book collection to the library, and that is what was up there at that time. We've since moved them out of the board room because the board room was being repainted. I'm sure you're aware of the fact that we just had a revitalization fund-raising drive, and the library has been painted and carpeted. It's had a facelift you might say.

Teiser: Very nice, too.

Pabst: It's much nicer.

Teiser: Where are those books now? Are they still shelved separately?

Pabst: They're still shelved separately, under lock and key actually, because there are valuable items amongst those. And as unfortunate as it may be, we do lose books at Mechanics' Institute.

Teiser: Do you lose more books than other libraries?

Pabst: I don't know. I don't think so. I think we lose less, but one of the things I found when I came here is that there had never been an inventory since 1854. So we did an inventory. It took us a year. We never closed. We worked over holidays, the Fourth of July and such, when the library was closed. It was an ongoing project. It went on for something like fourteen or fifteen months. We found out that there were thirty thousand titles missing from what was in the

Pabst: catalogue. So we do have a very accurate figure for the size of the collection as of 1977 when the inventory was completed. We don't have the staff or the means to do an inventory every year, but we can do some kind of statistical count.

Teiser: About how many books were there?

Pabst: The accurate count I think was in the region of a hundred and forty, a hundred and fifty thousand, and some thirty-odd thousand were no longer in the library. But the card catalogue had never been complete, either, so that's another project that we've been working on. I think we have another year to go on that. That was a four-year project that I undertook. So that we will have a good inventory.

Teiser: Have you increased the number of books since then?

Pabst: Yes. Now we have something like a hundred and sixty thousand volumes.

Teiser: What about shelf space?

Pabst: You know, in every library you have an acquisitions program and you have a weeding program that goes on simultaneously. I've never known a librarian who liked to throw away anything. They usually are collectors. But weeding has to be done, following certain criteria for disposal, of course. Where I know that a title is obsolete, or we've got four copies I can discard it more readily than a title which is only partially obsolete. But if I have a questionable area, I can always put that book down in the basement, and that gives it another year or two to see whether there's a demand for the title, because the card is still in the catalogue. That's why I frequently tell people you can browse through the shelves, but you should also browse in subject areas in the card catalogue, just as you do in any college or special library. I have notices all around the library saying if you don't find a title, ask at the desk, because it may be in the basement.

Covering Operating Costs

Teiser: To go back--in 1975 there was a campaign to get donations from Friends of the Mechanics' Institute. Has that continued?

Pabst: Yes. We contact the various companies. I think we have a list of some twenty-odd companies.

Teiser: These are all corporations?

Pabst: Not necessarily. Law offices, small engineering firms--

Teiser: But not individuals?

Pabst: No. Although a donation of anything over two hundred and fifty dollars constitutes a Friend, so if we have had donations over that amount from individuals, they are then a Friend. I think of one lady in particular, Jean Thompson, who comes in the library once a week, and she's been very kind to us. She is a Friend right alongside the corporation donors. There are companies whose libraries use our library. Most corporate librarians have a membership here, and they do use it. We serve them, again, mainly with information. We do reference work for them, as well as other book-borrowing privileges. In several cases, the corporation makes an annual donation to the library.

Teiser: Do they have a corporate membership?

Pabst: No. That's an area of membership classification which the board frequently considers a corporate membership, but there isn't such a thing at this time. We still operate under the same constitution as in 1855, which allows for an individual membership only.

Teiser: I see. But when the corporations are Friends, then they--

Pabst: What happens is that what they give us is a tax-deductible donation. They still need a membership, so it's usually their librarian who is a member and will then call in and use the library facilities.

Teiser: Then you have the membership dues, you have the Friends' contributions, and you have special funds drives, like the one--

Pabst: This is the only one I know of. There has never been anything like it previously in the history of the Institute, and this I think was mainly through the efforts of one trustee who is no longer on the board, Mario Ancona. I think it has been very successful. Although our goal was a little higher, I think we have raised something like a hundred and twenty thousand dollars at this time. The Friends' donations never amount to more than ten thousand dollars a year, usually somewhat less than that. Then there's the membership. But the big thing that brings in income, of course, is the building. You know, no library is a profit-making institution. [laughter] They don't come that way. But the money from the building, the rent from the tenants, does help us with our operating costs, for the library and the chess room.

Teiser: The chess room--does it contribute more than it uses?

Pabst: No, I don't think so. I think it's probably in the same area. You know, the membership covers both usage of library and chess room. It's all the one membership.

Teiser: Do women play chess now?

Pabst: Yes. A few of them do. And I think the chess director gives lessons, so there are a few women who attend the lessons, too. I think there are still some members of the Institute who regard it as the domain of the male, but there are a few women who go in there.

Changes Since 1974

Teiser: May I ask you how the library has changed since 1974.

Pabst: I was asking the staff this, too, because I wanted to be objective in this answer. We have some members of the staff who've been here thirty years, and one or two have been here ten and twelve years. The answer was unanimous. They agreed--and I agree with this, too--it's a busier, more lively place. There isn't perhaps so much of the reading room atmosphere with a few people in it. It's busier. Particularly on the third floor.*

Teiser: Physically it's much improved.

Pabst: Yes, I think it looks much better, and I think the placement of the various areas--I think it's got better traffic patterns, let's say, or the furniture lends itself a little better to the traffic pattern now.

Teiser: The furniture is more comfortable.

Pabst: Good, I'm glad to hear it. [laughter]

Teiser: It seems to me it is. I noticed in the minutes that there were forever groups of people complaining about the chairs needing new cushions. This was much earlier. Things like that.

Pabst: That's right. We have one particular member who feels that the chairs should have cushions, the ones that don't have cushions.

*Where the non-fiction and reference collections are housed.

Teiser: But you have, as you said, done a lot of painting and carpeting.

Pabst: Yes, and I think it's helped a great deal.

Teiser: And you've also--this goes in with the interest in information--put in a copy machine. Did you do that?

Pabst: There was a copy machine which didn't work very well, but, yes, I did bring in a new machine shortly after I came here. And that is very well used. We get all kinds of complaints if that machine doesn't work. And it brings in a little income. At least, it pays for our usage of the copying facilities. It covers our usage.

Teiser: The collection, then, has changed a bit, too.

Pabst: Yes, I think that the usage has changed, too. When I first came here, the circulation was mostly fiction and very little nonfiction. Which reminds me of what I think is a funny story. I was going up in the elevator one day, and another passenger said to a woman, "Do you know, there's another library on the third floor?" which made me realize that there were people who came into the Institute who never went upstairs, so they never saw the bulk of the non-fiction or the reference collection. I'm proud of our reference collection now, which I think is double what it was, at least double what it was when I came here.

Teiser: Really?

Pabst: Yes. I started a bulletin board here on the second floor showing new titles that were available on the third floor, and that sent people upstairs. And also I began buying in the nonfiction area. Now our circulation is at least even, if not somewhat more nonfiction than fiction at this point.

Teiser: I can remember that if the library didn't have a book, you could put a card in and ask them to buy it.

Pabst: That's still true, and I go through those every week, and I would say that 90 percent of them I fill. So that the membership still plays a part.

I should mention that we do not cater to each individual whim in building the book collection. The nice thing is that so many of our readers are so well-read, and their recommendations are so good. I should also say that out of that 90 percent, 75 percent I've already ordered--I was going to buy anyway, you see. So it's simply putting in for something that we've either got or is on order. But I'm very pleased to have those that I haven't been aware of. And then, I would say, maybe there's 10 percent that I don't

Pabst: purchase for various reasons. Either it's something that I consider should be purchased for individual use, or it would not fit in with our collection, and we're not about to go into an entirely new and unused subject area. Or I just don't feel that the price would warrant the usage. I have to be aware of the fiscal side of things.

Teiser: I know there have always been some eccentric members. Do some of them put in requests week after week for books on recondite subjects?

Pabst: That's right, yes. They still do.

Teiser: How about circulation? Has it increased?

Pabst: It's on the increase, yes. It has increased, but the figures that I don't have before me are--if you were to say has it increased over, say, the Depression, because I know that it was very high at that time, I could not say.

Teiser: People came in to get warm, for one thing.

Pabst: That's exactly what some of the staff members have said, that people came in to get warm. But it's increasing now from five years ago.

Teiser: The circulation, however, doesn't reflect use entirely, does it?

Pabst: Not at all. No, it doesn't.

Teiser: Do you keep tabs on users?

Pabst: We did--how long ago was this? We were interested in how many people used the library. I was in particular. And I think this was about two or three years ago, maybe two years ago. We did for three weeks, and I believe it was in either October or November, which is not necessarily a period of heavy usage, and I think we also did it again in April. We had someone do a count, and also had the members sign in, because we wanted to be very accurate. This took hours of work, and this is why we don't do it very often, because number one, we had to ascertain that they were a legitimate member. Then we had to discount them as they went on the second and the third floor. We did all that, and we found that the average number was something like seven hundred and ninety-two. It was close to eight hundred people that came in per day between the hours of nine and five.

Teiser: Could you establish a relationship between that and circulation so that you could project use from circulation?

Pabst: I've never thought of doing that, but we probably could, because we could look back and check those statistics out. I would say that it's probably in that range. I don't see much difference. At

Pabst: various times and various hours I have checked the number of people in the public library business branch, which is heavily used, or looks heavily used because it's a small room of people, say at one thirty, three thirty, four thirty, and I'll count forty people, and the room looks full. I return here and count forty-seven and you can't see them, because in such large spacious areas you can have forty-seven people and they are not noticeable. I've done this often, and it never seems to change very much. So I think the figures are fairly constant.

A service that started in 1979 is our giving library service to the ACT School, the drama school for the American Conservatory Theater, so this brings in a few more people at night.

Teiser: Do they contribute books to the library?

Pabst: No, they don't contribute books. They do pay us a fee. Their school year runs somewhere between September and May.

Teiser: That's a wonderful service.

Pabst: It is a wonderful service. They have to have it to get accreditation for their school. And they don't have the funding to set up an adequate library of their own. So we're of service to a drama group in the city.

Teiser: Rather younger--

Pabst: They are younger, and there's probably a few more younger people around here at night because of ACT.

Teiser: Do you ever have concern that your membership is too old?

Pabst: I hear this--people do bring this up frequently, and I think it's because they come into the library and they see a few older members, who, of course, have the time to be in here. What they don't see is that the bulk of the membership is not older, but they don't spend time in here because they don't have the time. But we know how many of our people are senior members, because we know the number who pay us the reduced dues. And it's less than a third.

Teiser: So there are new ones coming in all the time?

Pabst: Yes.

The Library Committee, the Board, and the Librarian

Teiser: How does the library committee function in relation to the librarian?

Pabst: The Institute is governed by a board of fourteen trustees. The board is then split into a number of committees, and the chairman of the library committee is, let's say, the arm through which the librarian channels her information to the board. I meet with the library committee once a month. And then I attend the monthly board meeting. The library committee gives the report of the committee meeting and any other report they may have on policymaking as far as the library goes, because the board are the group that makes the policy, and the librarian is the person who carries out the policy once it's made.

Teiser: Does the library committee make policy?

Pabst: They can recommend policy to the board as a whole, but it has to be approved by the board as a whole. I think there was a time when the librarian did not attend board meetings.

Teiser: In the board meeting minutes, Mr. Stump was invited to attend, I don't know if regularly or just on occasion.

Pabst: The librarian still attends only as a guest, and I do attend regularly as a guest. Again, the library committee is the channel through which I operate as far as the board and policymaking is concerned. I also have somewhat the same position with the membership committee, because this is something else that I took over when I came in here. The secretary ran the membership office until I took over the library, but because it played such a big part in the library, and at the time there was a retirement in the membership staff, I asked the board to put it under the umbrella of the library. Because the secretary is by and large concerned with the building, and the library and membership really have to be--

Teiser: Synonymous?

Pabst: Yes. So I meet with the membership committee once a month also. And then there's a lectures and classes committee. They don't meet regularly. So I'm involved in a number of the committees, but I'm not a member. It's just in my capacity as librarian.

Teiser: Do they make decisions without your suggestions?

Pabst: Yes.

Teiser: Can you object to them if you want?

Pabst: [laughs] They don't make some decisions at my suggestion. I really can't think of any. It's been a fairly amiable arrangement so far. I think the board has the best interests of the Institute at heart, but I think the difficulties that arise sometimes come out of the fact that a governing board so frequently isn't involved in the day-to-day activities of the operation. They don't work there, and in a board room you can make a situation sound very workable. You can make an argument for a case that in a practical sense doesn't work. The operating officer may or may not have the verbal means to answer that in a board room, but nevertheless, you can have the knowledge and know that in a practical sense it isn't going to be the best thing. But by and large, I've felt that the library committee has been supportive.

Teiser: I wondered how many members of the board or the library committee use this library?

Pabst: Some use it a great deal, and some don't. Now that was one thing when I first came here. I felt that the board members--we didn't see much of them, other than one or two. Then there were one or two members who were elected to the board who do come in the library a great deal. Actually, since I came here I think it's almost a completely new board.

Teiser: Are those now more the kind of people who do come into the library, who have the time or interest?

Pabst: As far as the nature of the board is concerned, in comparing them, I would say that it hasn't changed too much in spite of the fact that a number of them do come in the library. A number of them do use the library a great deal. On the other hand, some of the people who used to be on the board still do use the library now and then. I think Mr. Moore and Mr. David McDaniel, who still come in the library.

Areas for Future Development##

Teiser: Would you like to see it be a bigger library?

Pabst: Yes, indeed I would. I think when I first came here I was told by the president of the board, at that time, Mr. David McDaniel, that there had been some talk of and actually floor plans for the library being extended to the fourth floor. I wish that could happen. And yet, I suppose one can say how would you justify it? We can handle

Pabst: the eight thousand members. I suppose if it became more of a research institute, and our collection grew by leaps and bounds, there would be greater justification for that. But I would like to see Mechanics' Institute become a larger part of the city, as it used to be historically. You know, when you see this Crocker building going up across the way and all the people that are going to be coming in there and other parts of the downtown area where there's new building, I don't know whether this is going to bring a greater downtown population or not. And I don't know whether this will influence our membership or not, but of course that's looking at the situation in terms of number of members and usage, all rather businesslike, but just as a librarian who likes to see large libraries that will serve everyone, even if it's only once a year, I would like to see Mechanics' Institute grow. Rather than diminish.

Teiser: If it expanded its subject area, how would it do that? Where would it go?

Pabst: We certainly could do better in some of the fields we're already in. We could have a more extensive humanities collection to the point where we could offer research in the humanities. We don't at this point. I would say that we can probably help people to an undergraduate level in some areas, and then they have to go on elsewhere for something beyond that. We could go farther. We could have a more extensive reference collection and become much more of an information center, if you will. We could do something more like the London Library. I don't know whether you are familiar with that. They collect only in the humanities. A private library. But it serves as a research institution for scholars in the humanities. It would mean that, say in the field of literature, we'd have to bring in a lot more than what we have, a lot of retrospective stuff. And we'd have to buy much more in that area.

Teiser: The current tax situation which has made publishers cut back inventories, does that put an extra burden on the library?

Pabst: Yes. Because so many of our older books are still used, and we're one of the few libraries that have managed to hold onto them. But if they're lost now, either lost inadvertently by a member or lost who knows how, we can't replace them if they're out of print quite so easily, or we have to pay a premium if we can. But frequently there's no way of replacing them unless you can find a second-hand copy.

Teiser: If you were increasing your humanities collection, wouldn't you have to do that?

Pabst: Yes. Well, I'm a great believer in it can be done if you set your mind to it. If I were given that charge, I would do it. I might have to go through various overseas sources, but I could do it.

Pabst: I don't like paying premiums to people to do it. I'd much prefer to do it myself. [laughter] We have a very good P.G. Wodehouse collection, which is very well used. But I discovered that we had nowhere near his whole bibliography. So I set about contacting various secondhand dealers in England, and I think now that we probably have the best collection in San Francisco at least.

Teiser: There's a revival of interest in Wodehouse in England.

Pabst: That's right. And the books will become more valuable. And then after the inventory--there were titles in that inventory, you see, which I wanted back in that collection again. They might have been part of a series. Again, I was fortunate. That was the time when the English book prices were considerably lower than what they are now, and I was also getting very good secondhand copies that were like new. So I replaced a lot of those at that time. It's a good thing we took the action then, because it would be much more difficult now, or much more costly.

Teiser: Have you ever thought of going further into art books?

Pabst: Yes, and I do. That's one of the areas that I really try to patch up every time I can. I think it's improved to the point where we've been approached by two small art schools to ask if we would serve as their library. So there has been a noticeable improvement. Of course, it's like the technical areas; that's an expensive area. But it is an area that I would like to give more of my attention.

Teiser: You have always had a small California history collection, but I suppose there's no reason to go further into that for this library.

Pabst: Well, because others have the information, we don't do it, and yet I do try to do what I can in that area also. We'll never be able to stand up to the other libraries in town that have special collections in that area, so we really can't compete. On the other hand, because we do have enough of the old stuff around, I think it should be bolstered. Again, you see, that's still in the humanities area. It still gets a lot of use here, because people who come in--particularly young people who are doing papers for school--don't want to come here for one book and go to another library for another book. They want to do the whole thing here. So in a sense one has a responsibility, that if you're going to have a nucleus of a collection, you should bolster it. You should either get rid of it or turn it into something that's usable. And I think we are strong enough and our collection is strong enough in literature and history, particularly California history, that we should keep on. It may be a slow pace, but we should keep on trying to make it better and putting more into that.

Teiser: Through acquisitions of current books?

Pabst: Acquisitions of current books and where I get an opportunity to pick up something, either through a gift--or I'm known to go to friends' homes and entice books off their shelves that aren't being used and get them into the collection. Just to make the collection sound.

Teiser: You used to have a good run of San Francisco city directories--

Pabst: We do. We have every one of them, and we've been offered all kinds of prices for them. But that's the history of this city, and there's no way-- Now what I have had happen, a couple of people, businesses, have donated extra copies to us, and those I have sold for nice amounts of money, which was brought into the Institute. But we'd never let our collection go. We have at least one full run. We have duplicates in some instances. Again, people don't really understand what those are, and on occasion there have been people, even people on the board, who have said why don't we get rid of these, but I would be hard put to let anything that reflected the history of San Francisco out of this library, even if I had to put it in here,* you know, if we had a housing problem for it. But I think we should keep everything to the extent possible.

Teiser: You've pointed out directions in which you could go to enhance the collection. I hope you will have the opportunity.

Thank you very much.

*Mrs. Pabst's office

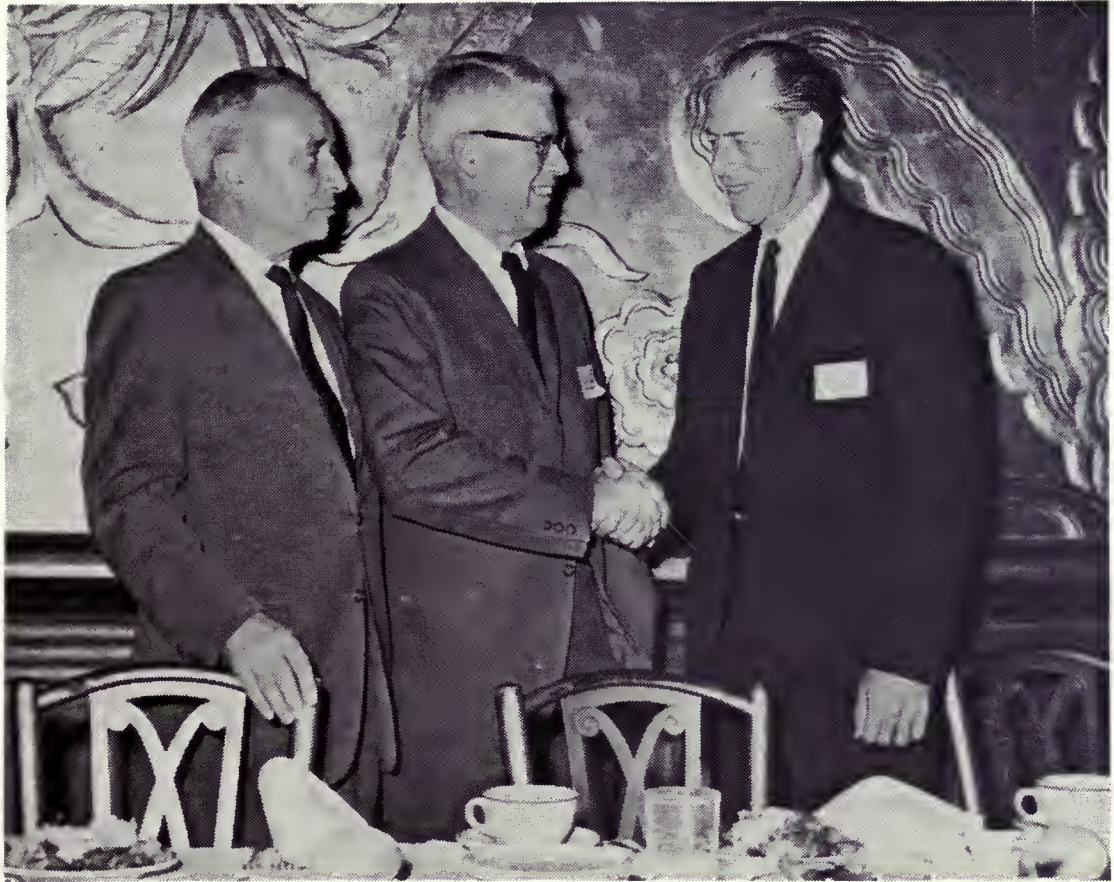
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APPENDIX A

Address Delivered by Theodore R. Meyer
on the Occasion of
the Mechanics' Institute's First Observance of
National Library Week, April 13, 1964



Theodore R. Meyer, newly-installed president of the California Bar Association, October 18, 1961. Left to right, Peter J. Crosby, Jr., Sam Wagener, and Theodore R. Meyer.

HISTORY OF THE
MECHANICS' INSTITUTE OF SAN FRANCISCO

"In the Beginning * * *"

In the beginning there was a small town whose name had just recently been changed from Yerba Buena to San Francisco. And this small town was without any facilities for adult or technical education, and almost without libraries.

And some mechanics met and said "Let there be a mechanics' institute", and there was a mechanics' institute.

The Mechanics' Institute of San Francisco began with a meeting of a small group of mechanics on a December evening in 1854. We still have the minutes of that meeting. And as we look at those minutes we see the very ink that flowed from the pen of Roderick Matheson, who served as Secretary Pro Tem of the meeting.

The first sentence of the minutes of that first meeting reads with impressive simplicity:

"A meeting of Mechanics was held in the City Tax Collector's office (City Hall) on Monday evening 11th Dec. 1854 for the purpose of establishing a Mechanics' Institute in this City."

Note that the meeting was described as a meeting of mechanics; and also that there was never any doubt or debate about what the organization was to be or what it would be called. It was to be a mechanics' institute.

At that first meeting a committee was appointed to draft a Constitution and By-Laws; and after several committee meetings the Mechanics' Institute was formally incorporated on April 24, 1855.

It is hard for us to visualize the San Francisco of 1854, but we may be able to see it more easily in our mind's eye if we recall that only a decade earlier California had been Mexican territory, San Francisco had been the sleepy little town of Yerba Buena, and the Gold Rush had not yet begun.

It is also difficult to imagine the primitive character of the educational facilities available in the San Francisco of 1854. There was no technical or scientific instruction nor any adult education to be had. The University of California was not to be founded until fourteen years later; Stanford not until almost forty years later.

The Mechanics' Institute was organized to help fill this educational void, and for many years, with its library, lectures and classes, it provided the most useful and important facility for adult education in Northern California.

Why the "Mechanics' Institute"?

Why was it called the Mechanics' Institute? What is a mechanics' institute? To answer these questions we must go back at least to the 1820's. In Britain the mechanics' institute movement is said to have begun with the founding of the Mechanics' Institute of Glasgow by Dr. George Birkbeck in 1823. Within a few years there were dozens, perhaps hundreds of mechanics' institutes all over England and Scotland.

Beginning about the same time, many mechanics' institutes were formed along the eastern seaboard of the United States. There were, however, institutions of the same character before this time. The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of the City of New York, which maintains a school called the Mechanics' Institute, was organized in 1792, and may still be found at 20 West 44th Street in New York City.

These mechanics' institutes, both in England and the eastern United States, were formed to meet a need for libraries and for adult education which was not then being fulfilled by public institutions. Most of them, like the Mechanics' Institute of San Francisco, were organized by groups of so-called mechanics, or skilled workmen; but

they generally opened their membership to all trades and professions, and extended their libraries and their instruction to include non-technical as well as technical subject matter.

With changing conditions, and particularly with the growth of public libraries and public education, most of the functions of mechanics' institutes came to be provided by tax supported institutions. The little mechanics' institutes, subsisting principally on small dues payments by members, found it difficult or impossible to compete with libraries and schools maintained by gigantic public appropriations. As a result, very few mechanics' institutes remain today, and those that survive have done so only because of some special or unusual circumstances.

There is still a prosperous and active mechanics' institute in Nottingham, England, and one in Montreal, Canada, as well as the New York Mechanics' Institute, heretofore mentioned. A few others continue to operate on a very small scale.

Why the "Mechanics'-Mercantile Library"?

You have probably noticed on our library doors, on the side of our building, and on our bookplates, the

name "Mechanics'-Mercantile Library"; and you may have wondered where the word "mercantile" came from.

About two years before the founding of the Mechanics' Institute of San Francisco by a committee of mechanics, the Mercantile Library Association was formed by a committee of merchants. Its principal purpose was to maintain a library. It built up a fine collection of books, but it was in constant financial difficulties, despite a series of lotteries which it was permitted to hold by a special act of the Legislature. Several attempts were made to merge it with the Mechanics' Institute. These finally resulted in the execution of Articles of Consolidation on January 27, 1906, whereby it was provided that "The libraries of the Mechanics' Institute and the Mercantile Library Association, the parties hereto, shall be combined under the name 'Mechanics'-Mercantile Library'." And that is why for some purposes we still use the name "Mechanics'-Mercantile Library".

By the same Articles of Consolidation it was provided that any member of the Mercantile Library Association could become a life member of the Mechanics' Institute by signing the Constitution and By-Laws. Thus the Mercantile Library Association gave us their library and we gave their members the privilege of life membership. This turned out

to be a bad bargain for us, because the 60,000 books which they gave us all burned up three months later in the fire of 1906, but the life memberships which we gave them continued on for the lives of their members. We still have at least a dozen life members who acquired their life memberships in this way.

The Fairs and Pavilions.

Although the main purpose of the Mechanics' Institute was the maintenance of its library and its adult education program, it was best known in the last century for its great pavilions and its fairs.

The fairs were held from 1857 to 1899. Their purpose was twofold: (1) to raise money for the support of the Institute, and (2) to promote the industrial growth of San Francisco and the surrounding area. They were successful in both respects.

The fairs were outstanding annual events in San Francisco. The first fair (of 1857) was open for 19 days, there were 941 articles on display, and awards were made of two medals, a diploma and a certificate of merit in each of 45 classifications. California artists displayed their pictures. As to the quality of the art, Bret Harte remarked that "the woolen fabrics and quartz crushers were better

than the pictures". There was a band concert every night. And the fair made a profit of \$2,784, after paying for the cost of the building and donating \$626.56 to each of the city's two orphan asylums.

Mark Twain, then a newspaper reporter, wrote a piece about the Mechanics Fair of 1864, which was printed in the Californian (newspaper) of October 1, 1864. He concluded his article with a conundrum: "Why was Napoleon when he crossed the Alps, like the Sanitary cheese at the Mechanics' Fair?" In his next piece he reported that he had received no answer to the conundrum. We have yet to learn, 100 years later, what the answer was.

The Mechanics' Pavilions were built originally as places in which to hold the fairs, but they served many other public purposes as well. They were the largest public buildings in San Francisco, and they were used for all sorts of public meetings and entertainments. In general they served the purposes now served by the Civic Auditorium, the Cow Palace and the Opera House.

The first Mechanics' Pavilion was located on Montgomery Street between Post and Sutter (southwest corner of Sutter and Montgomery), where the Crocker Bank, the 111 Sutter Building and the Barrett Garage now stand. The last pavilion was located on the block bounded by

Larkin, Grove, Polk and Hayes Streets, where the Civic Auditorium stands today. It was destroyed in the fire of 1906. Before the fire reached it, it had been pressed into service as an emergency hospital for victims of the fire and earthquake. The night before the earthquake it had been used for a "grand march on roller skates", and several nights before it was the scene of the famous prize fight between Bob Fitzsimmons and Philadelphia Jack O'Brien, which O'Brien won in the 13th round.

We still have some mementos of the fairs. Among them are the following:

Diploma Awarded at the Fair of 1858 to
C. Riley, for "a set of sails and
composition thimbles of superior
workmanship."

Diploma Awarded at the Fair of 1864 to
H. T. Graves, for "a large exhibit of
California wire goods." (H. T. Graves
was associated with Andrew Hallidie in
the development of the cable car.)

Certificate of Award of the first prize at
the Fair of 1897 to Daley & Davitt for
"assorted bread". (This certificate
was recently given to the Mechanics'

Institute by Bakers Union Local No. 24,
A.F.L.-C.I.O.)

Not long ago a friend of ours presented us with some cartons which once contained bottles of HUFELAND. What was HUFELAND? It was a beverage manufactured solely by N. Van Bergen & Co. of San Francisco. It was awarded First Premium for Purity and Excellence at the Mechanics' Fair of 1860.

According to the label -

"Hufeland is a scientific preparation made from an old Swiss formula and is composed of the extracted medical properties of imported herbs, barks and roots, combined with sufficient neutral spirits to preserve and hold these ingredients in proper solution."

"Hufeland will appeal to connoisseurs and to those who delight in a healthful appetizer and tonic.

"Hufeland is highly recommended for chronic constipation, indigestion, biliousness, dyspepsia and general disorders, caused by the inactivity of the liver, bowels and digestive organs, and by a gentle action upon the secretions of these organs will aid them in the performance of their natural functions.

"Hufeland is particularly recommended as a recuperant for overworked and run-down constitutions."

In addition to all these other useful qualities, "Hufeland contains 31% alcohol by volume".

Unfortunately the bottles did not come with the cartons, so we will never know what Hufeland tasted like, or just what it would do for our overworked and run-down constitutions.

The Earthquake and Fire of 1906.

No other event in the history of the Mechanics' Institute can compare with the earthquake and fire of 1906 in its impact on the fortunes of the Institute. The fire destroyed the Institute in the physical sense, leaving it nothing but a list of members, a strong tradition, a will to rebuild and a few records and mementos which miraculously survived.

It might be said that the Mechanics' Institute has built two libraries in its lifetime. The first library, of some 200,000 volumes, one of the largest and best in the Bay Area, was completely destroyed on April 18, 1906. The second library, built up over the years since the fire, has now reached 161,000 volumes, still some 39,000 volumes short of the number lost in the fire.

In addition to the Library, the fire destroyed the Institute's building, located on this same site, which housed the Library. And as previously stated, it also destroyed the last of the Mechanics' Pavilions, located where the Civic Auditorium now stands.

It has been mentioned that a few of the Institute's records and mementos did somehow survive the fire. One was the bust of James Lick, which you see in the main floor lobby whenever you enter the building. It survived because it is made of bronze, and it just wouldn't burn. Other survivors were the original Constitution and eight minute books. They were among the records which were saved, some by reason of being stored in two fireproof safes in the Library Building, and some by being transferred to the safe deposit vault of the Crocker Woolworth National Bank. The last of the minute books contains the following entry, dated April 18, 1906:

"San Francisco Wednesday April 18, 1906

"This day the general conflagration swept over San Francisco. The Mechanics Institute Building at 31 Post St. and all of its contents were completely destroyed except such records as were in the safes and such as were put in the Crocker Woolworth's Bank safe deposit.

Joseph M. Cumming, Secretary."
(Minute Book, p. 198)

With a little imagination we can see the Secretary, surveying the smoking ashes and recording in these sad words the destruction of the Institute's possessions, accumulated with great effort over half a century.

Great Names.

Any history of an institution must be in large measure the biography of the people who built it, maintained it, and lived with it, and whose names are associated with it.

Among the great names associated with the Mechanics' Institute, none ranks higher than that of Andrew Hallidie.

Although Andrew Hallidie was a man of many interests and achievements, he has gone down in history as the inventor of the cable car. He personally operated the grip on the world's first cable car, which descended the Clay Street Hill to the Kearny Street corner of Portsmouth Square on the foggy morning of August 1, 1873.

Five years earlier, in 1868, Andrew Hallidie became the President of Mechanics' Institute. He served in that capacity until 1877, and again from 1893 to 1895. The idea for a cable car first came to him in 1869, and thus he was President of the Institute during the entire period when he was perfecting his invention.

Another great name is that of James Lick, whose bust in the lobby has already been mentioned. He not only left the Institute \$10,000 for the purchase of books, but he donated the use of the lot, across the street from the Library, on which the first Mechanics' Pavilion was built.

Mark Twain's coverage of the Mechanics' Fair of 1864, as an almost unknown newspaper reporter, has also been described.

Sam Brannan, Thomas O. Larkin and William C. Ralston all assisted the Institute in its early efforts to finance its activities.

Then there was Horace Greeley. He took his own advice - "Go West, young man" - and went West himself. Some of you may have seen the recent republication of his account of his trip - "An Overland Journey from New York to San Francisco in the Summer of 1859". The Mechanics' Institute, then four years old, was not unprepared for his arrival in San Francisco. At the Directors' meeting of August 4, 1859, the following resolution was adopted:

"The President stated that his object in calling the Directors together, was for the purpose of considering what arrangements, if any, should be made on the part of the Institute to meet and receive Mr. Horace Greely, who, it was expected, would soon visit San Francisco. Mr. Greely was distinguished for his able advocacy of the Mechanical and other industrial interests of the country, and well merited any attention or courtesy the Board might deem proper should be extended to him.

"The subject was considered when Mr. Tennent submitted the following resolutions.

Resolved. That a committee of three be appointed to meet the Hon. Horace Greely on his arrival in this city and extend to

him the courtesies of the Institute, and facilitate his visit to our various mechanical and manufacturing establishments.

Resolved. That Mr. Greely be invited to deliver a lecture before the Institute, on the Pacific Rail Road, or some other subject agreeable to himself.

"The above resolutions were read, and a motion adopted."

Many famous authors have been members of the Mechanics' Institute, and have used its library in their work. Among them are Gertrude Atherton, Charles Caldwell Dobie, Kathleen Norris, Gertrude Stein, Niven Busch, Sterling Hayden, Harold Gilliam and Oscar Lewis.

Finally there was Henry Morse Stephens, the legendary history professor, who came to the University of California in 1902 and died in 1919. From 1903 until his death he delivered an annual lecture series at the Mechanics' Institute. This continued a tradition which began in 1870, when faculty members of the University of California commenced delivering lectures at the Institute. After the death of Henry Morse Stephens the lectures were continued by other U. C. faculty members for some years, but the practice seems to have been abandoned in the 1930's. These lectures were very popular and often drew audiences of 600 to 800 people.

We will have at least a token resurrection of this old relationship with the University next Wednesday evening, when Professor Jack Evernden of the University faculty will deliver a lecture on "A New Method of Age Dating Early Man Through Geologic Strata".

The Chess Room.

Today the Mechanics' Institute is mainly a library. But to many people and in many places it is even better known for its Chess Room than for its library. It has one of the oldest Chess Clubs in the United States, the Chess Room having been established in the early days of the Institute. Many of the great chess masters have given exhibitions here: Capablanca, Euwe, Alekhine, Lasker, Marshall, and only last year, Miguel Najdorf of Argentina.

Mechanics' Institute Today.

The Mechanics' Institute has a dramatic and colorful history. But no institution can live on its history alone. What do we have to offer today, and why have we survived when nearly all others of our species have fallen into oblivion?

It has been said by some that the day of the private subscription library is past, and that institutions

such as ours can no longer compete with the public libraries having enormous public funds at their disposal. This may be true as a generalization, but for some reason we have been an exception to the rule. In an area containing many University and public tax supported libraries, we stubbornly survive, charging the same \$6.00 annual dues as we did 100 years ago, receiving not a nickel of tax money, but on the contrary contributing to the public support through the payment of property taxes on our building.

Why have we been able to continue and prosper when so many others have succumbed?

It is because we are unique, not only in our history, but in other ways as well.

First, with some good luck and perhaps a little good management, we have built up an endowment now worth some \$3,000,000, on which we receive about \$100,000 per year income. We also realize income from rentals of space in our building. Without this investment income, we could not exist.

Second, we have a downtown location, in a city in which the main public library is situated inconveniently for many people.

Third, in an age of bigness we have been able to maintain the advantages of relative smallness. Our library

has a friendly atmosphere. People do not feel overwhelmed and frustrated when they come here for books. We have a helpful and courteous staff, and a fine personal relationship between our staff and our members.

Mechanics' Institute is more than a library, more than a building. Mechanics' Institute is a tradition. Families have belonged to it for generations. For some it is almost a home, or a way of life. Many would feel a great void in their lives if it did not exist.

We are proud of our unique history. But we are also proud of the fact that we supply a unique service, in some ways less complete than that of the public libraries, but in other ways more useful and satisfying to our members. So long as we can do this, there is good reason to hope that we can continue to serve the community for another hundred years.

In this Library Week observance we pay our respects to the great public and school libraries which the Bay Area is fortunate enough to possess. With their financial resources they can acquire and support gigantic book collections far beyond our meager capacity.

But we believe that just as there is still an important role to be filled by private schools and colleges,

so there is a place for membership or subscription libraries. We hope the time will never come when all libraries are alike.

We will do our best to continue furnishing a friendly, personal kind of library service to the community; to provide a quiet oasis, a place of refuge in the center of the noisy, crowded city, where one can escape for a time from the world of work and business, and find spiritual peace, refreshment and renewal in the world of books.

April 13, 1964

Theodore R. Meyer

APPENDIX B

Some Notes on the
History of the Mechanics' Institute
by Kathleen T. Pabst

Mechanics' Institute



Some notes on the History of the Mechanics' Institute by Kathleen T. Pabst, Librarian.

San Francisco in 1854 was still a frontier community suffering a depression as gold began to run out in the Sierra, and turning toward new industries in an attempt to revive and sustain its economy. The town, however, was without any facilities for adult or technical education. Only a decade earlier California had been a Mexican territory.

On December 11 of that year a small group of citizens met in the tax collector's office at City Hall to discuss the formulation of an organization that would meet these needs through education in the mechanical arts and sciences. The outcome of their discussion was Mechanics' Institute.

In March 1855, a constitution was adopted stating the purpose of the association to be the cultivation "of a social feeling of friendship and the mutual improvement of its members; the dissemination of information and useful knowledge by the establishment of a Library of circulation and reference, a Museum, and Reading Room; the formation of classes and delivery of lectures for tuition; the collection of a Cabinet, scientific apparatus, works of art, . . ."

Two classes of membership were provided for: stockholders with the right to vote and hold office, and subscribers with neither of these rights. In 1869 the Institute's constitution was amended to do away with the stockholder system, give each member a vote, and provide that all property of Mechanics' Institute should be held in trust for the association by a Board of Trustees.

The Institute's first quarters were a \$25-a-month room on the fourth floor of the Express Building on the northeast corner of Montgomery and California streets, owned by Sam Brannan. The directors considered the use of gas lighting but dismissed it as an expensive luxury and a special appropriation of two dollars was made for the purchase of candles.

The library had its start on April 5, 1855 when architect S.C. Bugbee presented to the Institute the first four books: a copy of the *Bible*, the *Constitution of the United States*, an encyclopedia of architecture and a work entitled *Curtis on Conveyancing*. Soon afterwards someone who had evidently misconstrued the intent of the latter title surreptitiously conveyed the *Bible* and the *Constitution* from the room, so that half the library was missing.

Keeping in mind the goals of their association, the directors and members furthered the city's interests by holding an exhibition of the industries, not only of the city but of the entire state; so the progress of the Institute began in 1857 with the first of the Mechanics' Fairs which were held almost annually until 1899. At the time of the second Fair in 1858, the population of the city was approximately 60,000 and many small industries had been started. The expositions, where mechanics and artisans exhibited their works, raised money for the support of the Institute and promoted the industrial growth of San Francisco. As the Fairs became events of great importance to the educational and social life of the city, one sprawling wooden pavilion after another was built to house them — six in all. Events other than the industrial expositions were held, including conventions, balls, promenade concerts, and the major prize fights of the day. The third and fourth pavilions, built in 1864 and 1868, were erected in Union Square, then a sand lot on the outskirts of town.

It was in the fourth pavilion that the first of a number of flying machines attempted to make a trip down the length of the main hall, drawing tremendous — if skeptical — crowds. The Avitor, which was shaped like a winged cigar, had a steam boiler and an engine in a framework underneath. The public did not believe the owner, Fred Marriott, when he said his machine would go over the Rockies to New York in about ten days.

In the year of the ninth industrial exhibition in 1874, President of the Board Andrew Hallidie — who had invented the cable car a year earlier — felt such personal responsibility for the success of the fair "that I felt it incumbered upon me to give it my almost undivided attention so that I closed my house and moved my family into a suite of rooms on Mission Street adjacent to the building and remained there during the continuance of the Exhibition."*

**Story of the Mechanics' Institute* by A.S. Hallidie
read to the Library Association of Central California, December 11, 1896



SIXTH MECHANICS' INSTITUTE PAVILION

The fairs generated their own news which was carried by the *Mechanics' Fair Daily*, a newspaper published in the pavilion. Mark Twain, an unknown newspaper reporter, covered the fair of 1864 for the *San Francisco Daily Morning Call*.

The proceeds from the fairs enabled the Institute to progress from the Express Building to increasingly finer quarters until in 1866, the first structure on Post Street was built. The most advantageous financial transaction ever entered into by the Institute was the purchase, in 1882, of a lot bounded by Larkin, Grove, Polk and Hayes Streets, where Brooks Hall and the Civic Auditorium stand today, on which the last Mechanics' Institute Pavilion was erected. Purchased for \$175,000, the property was sold to the City of San Francisco in 1912 for the grand sum of \$700,000.

By 1906 Mechanics' Institute Library had 135,000 books and 4,000 members. In January of that year the Institute absorbed the Mercantile Library collection, bringing the total library holdings to 200,000 volumes. The Mercantile Library Association had been formed two years earlier than Mechanics' in 1852. Its book collection was rich in treasures of art, literature and rare editions, and the consolidation of the two libraries made available to the people of San Francisco a magnificent collection. Three months later, in April 1906, the Mechanics' Institute building and all its contents were completely destroyed except for the original constitution and a few records and mementos that were either stored in fireproof safes in the library or were transferred to the vault of the Crocker Woolworth National Bank as the fire approached Post Street.

The bronze plaque of an early supporter of Mechanics' Institute, James Lick, in the foyer of the present building was retrieved from the ruins of the 1906 fire. After donating use of a block of land for the first Mechanics' Institute Fair in 1857, Mr. Lick bequeathed \$10,000 to the Institute in 1883 for the purchase of technical and scientific books.

Among the works lost in the fire were the American Almanack, granddaddy of the World Almanack, from 1830 on; 253 volumes in the Russian language on agriculture, arts and the sciences; the finest collection of patents on the West Coast, including a complete set of British Patent Reports which dated back to James I (1617), all in morocco bindings, presented to the library by the British government; original works of Hogarth; and a folio edition of *Audubon's Birds of America*.

The Librarian and Trustees immediately set to work to re-establish the library. A temporary building was erected at Grove and Polk Streets and in August 1906 the library opened with a collection of 5,000 books which was increased to 10,000 volumes as books came in from the East. In July 1910 the present nine-story Mechanics' Institute building was completed and by 1912 the library held some 40,000 books. Then as now, the Institute's library extended to the membership the privilege of going directly to the stacks to select their books.

In the early years the Institute held classes in mechanical drawing, applied mathematics, wood carving, iron work and other technical subjects. It provided free lectures, attended by as many as 600 to 800 people. These functions, which continued until they could be assumed by the public educational system, established the Institute's reputation as an educational institution and no doubt were responsible for that section of the Charter of the State of California which provided that the President of the Mechanics' Institute should be an ex-officio regent of the University of California.

A chess room was established in the early days of the Institute, making Mechanics' Institute Chess Club one of the oldest in the United States. Many of the great chess masters, such as Capablanca, Euwe, Alekhine, Lasker, Marshall, and Najdorf have given exhibitions at the club.

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Ruth Teiser

Grew up in Portland, Oregon; came to the Bay Area in 1932 and has lived here ever since. Stanford, B.A., M.A. in English, further graduate work in Western history. Newspaper and magazine writer in San Francisco since 1943, writing on local history and economic and business life of the Bay Area. Book reviewer for the San Francisco Chronicle since 1943. As correspondent for national and western graphic arts magazines for more than a decade, came to know the printing community.

